

Hell Hath No Fury

by SapphiresAndPineapples

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Summary: Our minds connect, our hearts combine. Our souls merge, what was once ours becomes mine. We are one. We are Dragonspawn. Enemies lurk in the shadows, unseen, unheard. Hiccup discovers this too late. All it takes is one plan woven in the mind of a conniving, treacherous outcast to irrevocably change him. Will it be for better, or for worse? HxA R&R

1. Chapter 1

**A/N ~ Hi there! I'm very excited to be posting this. This is my first multi-chapter fanfic, in my favorite fandom! :) I'd like to dedicate the dawn of this story to my awesome beta dragonlover17, who's helped me a great deal through beginning stages of this story. You rock girl! :) Please note that this story takes place a year or so before the sequel, so everyone looks like they do in the sequel. Also, pretend that Riders of Berk season 2 never happened because I haven't seen it and I don't know what happens. Reviews will be squealed over. Enjoy! **

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* * *

><p>The sun was just beginning to dust the edge of the horizon, casting its soft rays out and into the surrounding clouds turning them a rosy hue, when a large marshmallow cloud was blown apart in the wake of a black streak zipping through the air at top speed.<p>

An exuberant roar filled the air as the nightfury plummeted toward the ocean in a corkscrew, nearly hitting the waves before twisting upright and expanding its wings once more, letting the wind catch them and send them gliding just over the thrashing sea. A rider could be seen upon the back of the dragon, leaning over in the saddle and adjusting the clasp of the petal connecting his metal foot to the red

tailfin.

"Okay bud," he said, taking a glance at his dragon's face before finishing the adjustments on the clasp. "You ready for the next one?"

Toothless rumbled happily in affirmation, and Hiccup grinned in excitement. This move was a personal favorite. He hunched over in the saddle, tightening his grip, and Toothless' wings beat the air with quick, powerful strokes as they head straight for one of the rock pillars that rose from the ocean.

Toothless veered to the side just as they were about to hit it, facing the other way, and began ascending along it in an upward spiral, with barely a yard of space between the rock and Hiccup's back. When they reached the top, Toothless took the last turn and pulled away from the rock in a horizontal corkscrew and leveled out upside down. Hiccup even dared to loosen his grip on the saddle and pump the air with his fists, letting out an invigorated "Yeah!"

Toothless happily spat out a plasma blast, then had to veer downwards to avoid it, nearly making Hiccup lose his flimsy knee grip. A surprised yelp escaped him and he quickly reestablished his grip on the saddle, hanging on for dear life as Toothless spun in the air till they were upright again, and then settled into a glide.

Hiccup slowly straightened, breathing heavily. He took a moment to catch his breath and lower his heart rate before he let out the laughter that he couldn't hold in any longer.

"That was awesome, Toothless!" He exclaimed happily. "We did it! I knew that move was possible without injury!"

Toothless rolled his eyes, remembering the first two times they had attempted the move. Stoick had nearly pulled the plug then and there at the sight of all the bruises that came with falling off and being roughly caught by huge, hard paws.

Hiccup noticed the expression on his dragon's face and leaned forward closer to Toothless' head. "Oh come on," he said. "You can't possibly tell me you didn't enjoy that!"

Toothless grumbled quietly in his throat, making Hiccup laugh. Although still a little annoyed at his rider's consistent recklessness, he was also quite pleased with himself for getting a wonderful sound like that from the boy. There were too few of them these days for the nightfury's taste.

Over the last year, Hiccup's father had gotten into the habit of "a habit which Toothless' opinion was quite nasty" of assigning Hiccup more and more "responsibility". Those responsibilities around the village had recently gotten to the point where they intruded on he and Toothless' together time. And said dragon was not happy about it.

It wasn't just that he no longer got as much time with Hiccup as he would have liked, although they were always able to find some time to go flying or exploring, it was more that Hiccup hadn't been himself. He'd been more subdued and quiet, and he didn't smile or

laugh as often as he used to. Toothless had a feeling that these so called "responsibilities", whatever they were, had something to do with it.

That was the main reason besides his own enjoyment that he indulged Hiccup with all these insane acrobatics, and why he now twisted his neck to face him with a gummy smile. Hiccup laughed again, music to the dragon's ears, and leaned forward to rest his torso on Toothless' back, closing his eyes and breathing in the cool air.

Toothless glided up above the clouds, content to let his human rest and enjoy the ride. Just as they were approaching the Berk general area, Hiccup's eyes fluttered back open and his gaze drifted around lazily for a few moments. He sat up slowly once he realized where they were and sighed, glancing at the darkening horizon.

"We should probably be getting back now, bud." He whispered.

Toothless crooned forlornly, and Hiccup gently ran his fingers over the scales of the dragon's spine. "It's okay Toothless," He said. "We'll get back out soon, I promise." Toothless made a saddened noise in his throat, but did as his human wanted.

At first he gently sloped down so they could slowly glide downward toward the island, but upon glancing over his shoulder and seeing his human's face, he decided to go another way.

Hiccup yelled in surprise when Toothless suddenly took the plunge, going straight down and folding his wings. He pushed to go as fast as he could, while Hiccup struggled to get a good grip on the saddle and hold on for dear life. Within ten seconds they were nearing the surface of the ocean and Hiccup was shouting warnings to Toothless, who ignored him. With just barely a yard before impact, Toothless pulled up, smacking the water with his wings and splashing water all over Hiccup. Toothless sped upwards to the island, and a few seconds later they were landing smoothly at the forest tree line, a short ways from the village.

Hiccup sat still in the saddle for a moment, breathing heavily, before jumping off and leaning against Toothless' shoulder. "Wow, we've gotta add that one to the list!"

He smiled at Toothless, and then he was laughing, hard and uncontrollably. Toothless, exceedingly proud of himself, swiped Hiccup right off his feet with a paw and pulled him into a tangle of limbs, both dragon and human. They scuffled playfully for a while before Toothless pinned his opponent and started licking him. Hiccup managed to continue laughing hysterically while scolding the dragon about his slobber, and was able to escape Toothless' clutches after a moment.

Hiccup staggered to his feet and leaned on his smug looking dragon to catch his breath. He smiled at Toothless, not pretending to not know what was going on. He draped his arm over Toothless' neck and gave him a quick side hug. "Thanks bud." Toothless crooned happily and nudged his human back.

Hiccup pulled his arm back and knelt down, flipping the base of his prosthetic so he could walk. As he was standing back up, Toothless

playfully nudged him off balance, almost knocking him over. Once he regained his balance, Hiccup grinned at the dragon.

"So that's how we're gonna play this, huh?"

Toothless' ears danced as he jumped into a playful crouch, and then bolted. Determined for payback, Hiccup chased his dragon, nearly obtaining said payback multiple times before they reached the outskirts of the village. When Toothless stopped to look around and see how far they'd gone, Hiccup tackled him from behind and scratched him right below the chin in his happy spot. Toothless immediately collapsed, grinning deliriously and rumbling happily.

Hiccup clambered off and grinned at the prone dragon, dusting himself off with his hands. "Gotcha."

After a moment Toothless woke up, and decided on a look that conveyed annoyance, although he was secretly overjoyed. They entered the village, Hiccup politely greeting any Vikings they passed by, and headed to the forge.

Hiccup went in through the front door, while Toothless went around to the back of the building to go in through the large window Hiccup had installed in the outside wall of his backroom workshop. Hiccup was already at his worktable when Toothless jumped in, hunched over all the sheets of paper that went with designing some new contraption.

Toothless wandered into his corner and curled up on the floor, content to half watch his human and half doze for the rest of the evening. Hiccup had been perfecting the plans for that silly gliding contraption for a month now, determined to get them absolutely right. Toothless didn't understand it. If Hiccup wanted to glide he could just go flying like usual. Why did he need his own wings? And technically they weren't even wings because he was planning on folding them when not in use.

Shaking his head, Toothless decided to just stop fussing over it. It wasn't good for sleeping.

After a short while, Toothless' ears perked at the distinct sound of approaching foot and metal. His head popped up to look, and Hiccup was so engrossed he didn't even notice when Gobber hobbled in.

The large blacksmith cleared his throat. "Hiccup?" He waited, but after a moment of no response he tried again. "Hiccup!"

That got the younger man's attention, causing him to jump slightly and look up for the source of the sudden noise. "Oh, hey Gobber." He greeted. "What's up? I'm a little busy right now, but if you really need me I can be out in a few."

Gobber gestured dismissively with his prosthetic hand, currently a hammer, and replied "No, no, nothing like that. Stoick wanted me to tell you to meet him back at the house. Said he wants to talk to you."

Hiccup nodded. "Alright then, I'll head up there in a bit once I'm finished here."

But Gobber shook his head. "No lad, he said as soon as possible. For you that means right now."

Hiccup looked ready to argue, but the look Gobber was giving him was making him rethink that plan. He sighed and put down his charcoal pencil. "Alright, I'm going." He stood and went out through the window, followed by Toothless. They came around to the front of the building, and passing the window, Hiccup flinched when he saw Gobber basically leering at him. Hiccup paused and peered through the window back at him.

"Be a bit more creepy, why don't ya!" He invited sarcastically.

Gobber ignored him and promptly resumed his work. Hiccup rolled his eyes and walked away, wondering what could be so important.

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Hiccup made sure to close the door softly after following Toothless into the big house. He looked around for his dad, but, seeing no one, he passed through the large room over to the stairs that led up to his room. About halfway up though, a deep voice boomed behind him.

"Hiccup."

Toothless jumped in surprise, and Hiccup whipped around to face the source, who was standing in the middle of the room by the fire pit with his hands on his hips looking menacing. Hiccup slowly moved to join Stoick, and eyed him suspiciously.

"Uh, how did you do that? You weren't even in here when I came in."

Stoick ignored the comment. "We need to talk, son." He said.

Brow creased in confusion, Hiccup sat down on the floor by the fire next to Toothless, with his elbow resting on his knee, and was followed by Stoick who took a seat in his enormous chair.

"So what's going on Dad? Why are you being all mysterious?"

Stoick stared at the fire for a moment before answering. "I received word recently of a gathering, taking place at the Bog-Burglar Islands."

Hiccup frowned. "A gathering?"

Stoick nodded. "Many of the different tribes are attending." He explained. "And in the notice I received, they requested specifically that you attend as well."

Well this is confusing. Thought Hiccup as he leaned back against Toothless. "Why do they want me there?" He asked. "Why not you? You're the Chief."

Stoick looked uncharacteristically worried now as he replied "They said they need your dragon expertise. It sounds simple enough, but

I'm reluctant to respond. You know how I hate going in with such a low level of information, especially where your safety is concerned."

Hiccup almost laughed as he got to his feet. "My safety? Dad, I have Toothless. And in case you hadn't noticed over the past five years, I'm pretty capable of taking care of myself now."

Stoick rose as well, towering over her son still. "I know that Hiccup, but this whole business has me uneasy. I'd rather you not go at all."

The younger man flashed his signature grin. "Well, you've got me curious, so now I have to go." When Stoick didn't look like he felt any better about it, Hiccup added "Okay then, how about I take Astrid with me? She's got a good level head, and she's naturally suspicious. She'll know if anything's off, and she'll help Toothless keep me out of trouble." Said dragon grunted in irritation as if offended that Hiccup would even consider the thought that he needed help doing his job.

Stoick heaved a huge sigh and massaged his head. "Alright Hiccup. Although I suppose there's no stopping you anyway once you've got your mind set?"

Hiccup randomly fiddled with the straps of his bracers and smiled at his father, suddenly perky with excitement. "Yep."

Stoick waved his hand dismissively, shaking his head. "Alright, you leave in the morning. But I want you home in no more than two weeks."

Hiccup saluted. "Will do, Dad. Come on Toothless." Hiccup strode out the door with Toothless hot on his heels, and together they took off into the night sky. "Let's go find Astrid."

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To Be Continued...

A/N ~ SO! To clear a few things up... I used the Bog-Burglar Islands because I know they exist, I don't know anything about them and I haven't read the books, so please don't go harping on me if I do something inaccurate.

Second of all...oh geez, I don't have a second of all. XD Please review! :)

2. Chapter 2

I didn't want to wait. ;) **Enjoy!**

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><p>Hiccup stuffed the last of what he needed into the pack, and then strapped it securely to Toothless' saddle. "This is it bud," he said to his dragon, smiling. "We're finally gonna get out of

here."<p>

Toothless purred in response with a gummy smile, while Hiccup moved over next to his head and sat down on the grass. Toothless laid down next to Hiccup and rested his head on his crossed paws, watching his human with big eyes. Hiccup leaned back on his hands and silently watched the sun rise slowly into the pink morning sky, illuminating his home with soft, golden rays and warming his face. He closed his eyes, soaking up the heat.

Hiccup wasn't normally awake before the crack of dawn, but all during the night he had been too worked up to get any real sleep. Not that he cared; he was too enthused about this trip, this foray to islands unknown. The fact that there wouldn't be any actual foraging did nothing to dissuade the young dragon trainer from this line of thinking.

Although it wasn't as much the imagined foraging that had Hiccup so eager, but rather the knowledge that he would be away. He would be free, for a while at least.

Hiccup loved his father, but sometimes â€" more often than not lately â€" he just wished Stoick would get off his high horse and listen. He was the chief; Hiccup would have thought he had more important things to do than keep his son 'busy.' Or, as Stoick was thinking just not saying, 'out of trouble.'

What does he even think I get into? Hiccup wondered to himself.
It's not like anything ever _happensâ€|often._

Having had this conversation with himself and with Toothless many times already, Hiccup turned his thoughts to other things. He leaned backward until he was laying on his back and cupped his hands behind his head comfortably. The soft grass tickled his skin, but the perfect view of the clear blue sky was worth it.

He gazed at the expansive unknown and the small, thin tufts of cloud that filled some of the blue, and his thoughts drifted to Astrid. That unique beauty that only she possessed that seemed to light up a room. That hair, that nose, those eyes, those lipsâ€| Hiccup imagined what she would look like if she let her hair loose from that braid and let it fly about her shoulders, framing her face and shining in the sunlight.

As if on cue, Hiccup heard the beating of wings on the air, and the slight vibration in the ground beneath him as Stormfly landed. Another big hint was when Toothless jumped up and bounded in that direction, eyes big and tongue hanging out.

A smile spread across Hiccup's face as Astrid came into view and sat down next to him on the grass, leaning back on her hand and grinning at him.

"Good morning milady." Hiccup said playfully, grabbing her other hand and intertwining it with his. "And how are you this fine morning?"

Astrid shook her head and chuckled softly. "Well you're being extra charming today. It wouldn't have anything to do with this trip now would it?"

Hiccup smiled innocently. "Now what would make you think that?"

He suddenly took a swing at her arm with his, knocking it away and making a surprised Astrid fall onto her side next to him. Giving a quiet laugh, she scooted closer to him, one hand still in his and the other hugged to her chest. They laid there like that, watching the sun continue its journey heavenward, for a while, Astrid eventually extricating her limbs and reaching behind Hiccup's ear to install a braid or two. Hiccup watched her out of the corner of his eye, almost visibly grinning at how cute she was when she was concentrating. Apparently she had never braided him from this angle before.

Finally, when Hiccup couldn't stand the waiting anymore, he gently pulled away from Astrid and sat up.

"Hey, I wasn't done!"

"I know, but we have to get going. Look how high the sun is!"

Astrid sat up as well, grabbing his arm to keep herself balanced. "I guess we've been sitting here longer than we thought."

"No kidding." Hiccup got to his feet and went over to get Toothless' attention, who was sprawled on top of Stormfly, both sleeping.

"Toothless!" He called in a singsongy voice. "Wake up, bud!"

He grabbed the nightfury's tail and, with much effort, physically pulled him off of Stormfly. Toothless didn't wake until he landed on the ground, then he jumped awake with a groggy half growl. Hiccup laughed as Toothless gradually put his brain back together, and then rubbed the dragon's head.

"Come on Toothless, we gotta go."

Astrid had by then accomplished the same with Stormfly, and she was already mounted and smiling at Hiccup. "Well?" She said playfully.

"Are we going or what?"

Hiccup's face split into the biggest smile Astrid had ever seen as he jumped onto Toothless and secured his prosthetic. Then he looked back at her and replied "Yes we are."

Together the two dragon riders took off into the air, swooping around each other in spirals above Berk with the cool wind blasting their faces. They flew at top speed straight into the sky until they were above the clouds, where Toothless went crazy, with no objection from Hiccup.

The pair flew through and around the clouds, over and under them, and they even flew in them, emerging coated with a thin layer of moisture from the condensation. Hiccup was glad of the moisture on his face, for it intensified the feeling of the wind making it all the more exhilarating.

Hiccup closed his eyes against the bright sunlight as they turned upward towards the heavens, then slowed to a stop midair and fell back down into the clouds. Emerging beneath them, Toothless re-extended his wings and they spun upright once more, zipping away

from Berk and out to the far away islands in the distance.

Hiccup breathed in the cool air deeply, overcome by the sudden sense of euphoria that came with true flying. The kind of flying where you feel like you could keep going forever and never have to land; the kind where you felt completely and utterly free, with no obligations, no limit, and no one else in existence but you and your best friend. It was exhilarating.

It didn't take long for Astrid and Stormfly to catch up and glide into place beside them, Astrid grinning like crazy just thinking about all the moves Hiccup and Toothless had pulled in the last twenty seconds. Hiccup smiled at her reaction. Perhaps he would teach her those moves someday.

The two of them glided along the skyline side by side, enjoying the companionable silence and relaxing in their saddles, settling in for a long flight.

Hiccup had planned it all out the night before. At average speed they would get approximately halfway to the Bog-Burglar Islands by nightfall, requiring that they land somewhere for the night. He had calculated the distances from Berk to the small and solitary islands that were scattered across the Barbaric Archipelago and drew up their exact route, deciding on a small and inconspicuous island "an oversized slab of rock and grass really" to camp for the first night. Provided they left first thing the following morning, they would be in the Bog-Burglar's halls by sunset.

Satisfied with his thorough planning, Hiccup began to ponder the reasons behind this gathering. What if they had found a new species or two of dragon? Or maybe decided they wanted to train some dragons themselves? Whatever the reason was, Hiccup was eager to see what had them actually requesting him.

Hiccup was lost in his thoughts and imaginings of new dragons for a good few hours, long enough that he didn't notice the darkening of the skies around them, or the dense, grey clouds heading straight for them. He didn't even look up until Astrid spoke up with a strange tone to her voice.

"Um, Hiccup? I think we have a problem."

"What is it Astrid?"

He was looking at her concernedly, but when she appeared transfixed by something in front of them and he turned his head to follow her line of sight, he almost gasped in shock.

Before them was a dark horizon, literally. This thing stretched as far as they could see, both ways, making for no alternate route. Faint spurts of blue light could be seen flashing in the thick, swirling darkness and they could already feel a light mist reaching their faces.

"Whoa! Astrid can you see any way around it from your angle?"

"I can't see anything past those clouds!" She answered, sounding nervous.

Hiccup's eyes quickly flitted all around the dark mass, searching for any possible safer way maybe above it. Coming up with nothing, he twisted around, pulling strips of cloth from his pack and wrapping them around as much of the metal wires connecting the saddle to Toothless' tail fin as he could. Astrid finally managed to tear her eyes away from the approaching chaos and noticed Hiccup moving around.

"What are you doing?!" She shouted to him. They were already close enough to the storm to clearly hear the heavy rain and thunder. "Shouldn't we be getting out of here or something?!"

Hiccup quickly finished what he was doing and turned to her, a grim expression on his face. "There's nowhere to go Astrid, we have to go through it!" He was shouting now just so she could hear him.

Astrid balked at him. "Are you insane?!" She demanded. "Not only is this just a horrible plan, but we've got metal all over us for Thor's sake!"

"I know, but what other choice do we have?! I'm not turning around Astrid!"

Astrid threw up her hands and let out a loud groan, though it was barely audible through the volume of the storm, which was almost upon them. She glared at Hiccup for one long second before hunching down in her saddle and gripping the handle tightly. "If we die in this storm I'm gonna kill you Hiccup!"

Hiccup almost smiled, relieved that she trusted him this much. He leaned down in his own saddle, squinting against the now oncoming rain, and shouted back "Looking forward to it milady!"

With one deep breath each, they entered the rolling darkness.

Hiccup had never seen clouds so thick and dark before. Almost the instant he and Astrid had entered the vortex he had lost all track of direction. Toothless could barely keep himself steady with all the wind that buffeted them relentlessly, and Hiccup could barely see two feet in front of him. They were effectively flying blind.

As the wind battered his body and the rain pelted his arms and face, Hiccup strained to hear anything besides the thundering of the storm. Both he and Toothless jumped every time the crack of lightening resounded nearby, and Hiccup prayed that Astrid and Stormfly were faring as well as he and Toothless were; as in still alive and flying. It really depended on perspective in this situation.

Astrid, meanwhile, was clinging to her saddle for dear life, her hair plastered to her face, as Stormfly strained against the wind. Why she had let that idiot talk her into this was just beyond her comprehension at the moment, as it was clearly a suicidal decision based on impulse and gut. Normally she admired Hiccup's quick thinking and instincts, but at this second she wanted nothing more than to go home and forget the whole thing right now.

Thor almighty, get a hold of yourself! She scolded herself inwardly_. You're a Viking for crying out_ _loud, the best shieldmaiden on Berk! Man up!_

Emotions and feeling firmly shoved aside, Astrid tentatively raised her head to look around her. She needed to find Hiccup, they needed to stay together. She caught a sudden glimpse of a wing cutting through the clouds to her left, and she called out to him.

"Hiccup! Hiccup where are you?! Hiccup!"

She doubted he could hear her, but she kept it up until her voice gave out. She had no idea how long she and Stormfly had been flying, but her scaled friend was starting to tire. Astrid twisted to her left and right, eyes darting all around her suspiciously in search of more glimpses of the frequently appearing wingtips in the clouds surrounding her.

After what seemed like forever, she heard a familiar roar very close by.

"Hiccup?!" She called, hoping he was close enough to hear her this time. But not a moment later, her heart stopped at the loud crack zap of lightening, followed by a scream of pain. She knew that scream, all too well.

"Hiccup!"

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To Be Continued...

**A/N ~ I know right. A cliffhanger already? It worked to end it there, so take that. ;) **

**Please Review! **

3. Chapter 3

**Here I am with chapter 3! :) **

I'd like to extend a big thank you to **CanIHaveAHug, Wakodsit, **and **dragonlover17 **for the follows! **
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**Also, I forgot to say this earlier, but I DO NOT OWN How To Train Your Dragon, nor do I own the coverart. :(**

**Anyways, enjoy chapter 3, and don't forget to review!
:) **

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No. This can't be happening. Nononononononoâ€¦

Astrid took her millionth dive to the surface of the frigid waters with Stormfly, skimming the waves and looking. Looking, looking, lookingâ€¦

That's all I did. Astrid thought numbly to herself.
Look.

Stormfly pulled up from the water and slowed to a stop, hovering in

place, and Astrid released her hands from the iron white-knuckled grip she had on the handles of the saddle and ran them through her hopelessly tangled and messy hair, clenching them into fists and then unclenching them again and again. This only served to worsen the blinding headache she had developed from lack of sleep and all the squinting to see through the surface of the dark ocean, but she didn't care anymore. Normally things like that would bother her immensely and put her in a most foul mood, but right here, right now, nothing else mattered. Nothing else existed.

Astrid slowly pulled her fingers from her still-wet hair and moved them to her face, which, not surprisingly, was utterly freezing to the touch. She rubbed her itching eyes, and then slowly her arms dropped to her sides.

She turned her head slightly to the right, looking out again over the calm black of the ocean. The storm had dissipated hours ago " or was it days? Everything was a blur. She and Stormfly had battled with its strong winds and darkness for what felt like an eternity, she, all the while, screaming for him. Calling him, begging him to answer her. Pleading for something, anything, to let her know he was still there fighting right beside her.

Astrid didn't believe in fate. That was already a given with the Hofferson family, but definitely more so with the younger woman. She'd heard stories her whole life about destiny, and courageous heroes who gave up everything to save those they love and yet survived the adventure through belief in something greater. She'd heard the legends about how your fate is tied to the land, and how your life and the lives of those around you are woven together like a great tapestry with a wondrous pattern. But she'd never allowed those stories to go to her head, to fill her mind with ideas that had no basis in reality. She believed in glory, in bravery, and in bringing honor to her family. But then, one day at sunset, she took a closer look at the village klutz.

Not only in the days following that night, but throughout the following years, Astrid marveled at the new world around her, one that she never imagined could have existed. Her dogmatic bubble had been popped by a set of retractable teeth, and slowly but surely she had opened up her mind, but more importantly her heart, to that particular klutz.

Through the ups and downs of their relationship, Astrid had changed. She knew it and believed she was now a better person for it. Through it all, Astrid now accepted and truly believed that fate was a real thing. A real thing that pulled the two of them together and kept them together through fire and ice, joy and sadness, life and even near-death.

Astrid firmly believed that the fates of Hiccup and herself were inexplicably and undeniably tied together, woven into something that was beautiful and strong that would truly last.

So why? Astrid silently asked the stars. _Why is he gone? Why did something like this have to happen and all I could do was look? All I could do was nothing._

Astrid looked down at her hands as she realized they were shaking.

Shaking.

Astrid never showed weakness, ever. Not even when she was alone. She was a strong and fearless warrior, leader, and protector of her tribe and family. A Hofferson, capable of anything and everything with enough sharpened axes and willpower.

But, Astrid realized, that was not her. Not now. Right now, she was a just a girl. A girl lost in the midst of endless ocean, a girl alone in her grief. Alone in the longing for the boy she loved who was never coming home. And it made her mad.

Astrid's eyes slowly squeezed shut against the tears that she had been able to hold back until now, but they leaked out and silently slipped down her cheeks. Once again her fists clenched and her shoulders tensed as her eyes reopened and she stared down at the black water in thought.

Making a decision, she carefully pulled her legs up and got situated so she was on her feet crouched on the saddle, leaning on her hands for support. She leaned forward slightly to scrutinize the water for a minute, before tensing her legs and coiling to spring. As if aware of what was going on, Stormfly suddenly looked at her questioningly, cooing concernedly.

Astrid ignored the Nadder and pushed off with her legs, reached out with her body and plummeting toward the churning ocean. Letting out a screech of surprise, Stormfly zipped down after her, catching Astrid's arm in her claws and flying up and away toward the dark horizon.

The blonde protested vehemently. "Stormfly, what are you doing?! Let me go, I have to find Hiccup!"

The Nadder paid no attention, infuriating her rider. "Stormfly, stop! No!"

Astrid twisted her head around to look around her in desperation. This general area was her best shot at finding Hiccup, and if they left now she would have no choice but to acceptâ€¦

No. She said firmly to herself. _I will find him; I just have to keep looking._

Astrid turned back to her dragon. "Stormfly, we have to keep looking!" She shouted, hoping the dragon would listen. "Stormfly, please!" When the dragon resolutely ignored her, she groaned loudly in frustration, but then released a tiny whimper at the pain the groan caused in her abused vocal chords. All the screaming and shouting in the last day had done a number on her throat and voice, and the unintentional whimper made her scowl.

Realizing there was no way for her to get back onto Stormfly and that she would have to hang in the claws for the rest of the journey to who knows where, Astrid quieted with a sigh. She nearly flinched as her current feelings returned to the forefront of her mind with a vengeance, giving her heart a sharp pang.

Closing her eyes, Astrid willed her body to relax, loosening her

fingers from their fisted positions and resting her chin on her chest, not bothering to watch where Stormfly was taking her. Mentally, she reviewed her situation.

First, she had no idea where she was. The storm had blown all sense of direction and location out the window, and Hiccup had the map. So, they were stuck in the middle of nowhere over open ocean.

Second, Stormfly seemed to be flying in an absolutely random direction with no actual destination in that big scaly head, so the chances were pretty high that land would soon become a distant memory.

Third, they had already been flying for hours on end, through a storm and otherwise, and Stormfly was exhausted, so they wouldn't last long flying aimlessly.

Fourth, hanging like this from Stormfly's claws was doing wonders for Astrid's arm and shoulder. It was already numb from disrupted blood flow and cut-off nerves.

All in all, not a preferable situation. Astrid thought, distracting herself from everything at hand by concentrating on remembering other situations as bad as or worse than this one. Time passed as she unsuccessfully tried to focus, and after the longest time Astrid finally reopened her eyes in frustration, unable to quell the tightness in her chest. But the sight that met her eyes was no less than shocking.

Not only was it nearly dawn, but somehow they were approaching some rocky land formations that jutted out of the water. They appeared to be connected to a much larger land mass behind them that expanded quite far. How Stormfly managed to fly this far through the night was beyond the surprised Astrid.

As Astrid twisted her head around to see everything, she noticed a shudder passing through Stormfly. She dismissed it at first, but then it passed again, and again, until it was a continuous tremor. She looked up at the Nadder, realizing just how exhausted the dragon was.

"Stormfly?"

The dragon's eyes were starting to flicker, and her grip on Astrid's arm was gradually loosening.

"Stormfly, it's okay. Just hold on a little longer, we're almost there."

The tremors running through the Nadder worsened quickly, but she appeared to be fighting the exhaustion. Afraid they wouldn't make it, Astrid continued to encourage her dragon, urging her on as they drew closer and closer. Finally, just as Astrid was sure Stormfly would drop out of the sky, they passed over the first spires of rock that marked the beginning of land.

"You did it Stormfly!" Astrid shouted to her dragon, about to burst with relief. "We made it!"

The relief was short-lived.

Not a moment after reaching the rocks, Stormfly was shaking with exertion, and they began to lose altitude. Astrid's shouts of relief became cries of panic as they plummeted toward the ground, and the dragon's grip on Astrid's arm was dangerously loose. Astrid wrapped her fingers tightly around one of Stormfly's claws just as they lost their grip altogether, but she was unable to hang on for more than a few seconds before she fell at a frightening speed towards the craggly grey rock.

Stormfly's wings finally stopped flapping and she too began the quick descent from the air. Astrid screamed as she fell, but she tensed and quickly prepared her body for the pain she was sure to be assaulted with in mere seconds. Her feet touched the ground and she tried to reduce the jarring with a roll, but gravity did it for her as a sharp pain lanced through her leg and she rolled uncontrollably and painfully across the rocky ground.

She finally came to a stop when she crashed into a tall rock that rose from the ground, her head slamming into it with a loud and excruciating smack. Despite being still, Astrid's vision swam and her head felt like she'd been in the mouth of a thunderdrum when it released a sonic blast. The back of her head suddenly felt warm and she could vaguely feel the tremors in the earth as Stormfly crash-landed somewhere near her. She tried unsuccessfully to regain her bearings, but everything around her was a blur, making her eyes hurt and adding to the pain in her head.

Her eyelids were suddenly very heavy. She tried to keep them open and even tried to move to see if Stormfly was alright, but her body wasn't responding and her vision was darkening.

Everything started to fade as a faint and echo-y sound reached her ears and a large shadow appeared in front of her, blocking out the remains of light in her world and reaching out to her.

She lost consciousness just as a hand touched her arm.

~%~

His fingers were the first to show signs of life. They moved ever so slightly, curling into his palm before unfurling again. A small breath made its way into his lungs and his chest moved to accommodate it. His head, laid to the right, slowly shifted till he faced upward, and his eyes fluttered open to the low light that met the young dragon trainer.

It took a few moments for Hiccup's vision to clear, but once he could see straight he saw a dark, rocky ceiling above him covered in dancing shadows that a lone torch shone upon it. But there was something off about it that he couldn't place.

Dismissing the ceiling, Hiccup pulled himself into a sitting position. At least he tried to. His body wasn't responding, and his muscles weren't reacting when he told them to move. Eyes widening, his breathing picked up and he twisted his head frantically to scan his limbs for injuries or restraints. Seeing none, Hiccup tried again to move, with no luck. After several attempts at movement, he finally stopped the futile attempts and stilled, once again looking at the rock ceiling.

Then, he saw it; the discrepancies in the rock that were surprisingly even and of a different hue. Squinting, he finally realized what he was seeing. He began turning his head in alternating directions, scrutinizing his surroundings in the dim light, heartbeat quickening in his chest.

His neck was starting to ache from the exertion of twisting it in every which way as quickly as he was, but he didn't notice, too absorbed in what his brain was telling him he was seeing.

After seeing all he could from his angle on the floor, he released the tension on his neck and tried again, more urgently this time, to move. He sighed in relief when his right arm moved to his side and his elbow bent. He flexed his hand in a fist to make sure it was all there, a slight smile tugging at his lips, but then he froze as the image of a nightfury shot to the forefront of his mind.

"Toothlessâ€¦!" He muttered, panicking again.

He automatically whipped his head in every direction again in search of his dragon, but just as soon remembered he had already cleared the area of any other living thing. Dread seeped into Hiccup's mind as he thought of his best friend, and he mentally facepalmed for actually thinking Toothless was here, if even for a moment. He couldn't tell the size of the dim cavern he was in, but he was positive Toothless wouldn't fit in the small space he currently occupied; the small space of the cage.

~%~

To Be Continued...

A/N: Yes, there is a point to this story, I just don't like to rush things. And I'm gonna try to make the chapters longer. Please review, and thanks so much for reading! :)

4. Chapter 4

Hey guys! Sorry for the wait, but it's longer than the last few! Seriously, I almost reached 4,000 words, that's double my norm! :)

Btw guys, I wanted to let you know that I changed the summary, so there's no confusion.

Huge thank you's to **the dirty ripper, **Saphirabrightscale**, and **Lady-von-Bielefeld **for the follows! **

And a special thank you and dedication to Lady-von-Bielefeld **for being the inspiration for me to get this story written! It was just an idea in my head and she inspired me to take action. And for leaving such wonderful reviews every chapter that always lift my spirits, and just being an amazing friend! :)**

**Enough blathering, enjoy! **

~%~

Hiccup eyed the metal bars surrounding him apprehensively, his mind mainly on Toothless. This cage was not wood, it was metal. There was no reason to put so much effort into metal cages unless you needed them strong enough to contain something obviously not human. A dragon for instance.

Shards of worry penetrated Hiccup's thought process as he began thinking about who he might be dealing with here. Then he paused. On second thought, what was he dealing with? The last thing he rememberedâ€¦|

Hiccup would have thought he'd get a headache from all the images rushing through his head simultaneously. He suddenly remembered everything in full clarity: he and Astrid flying into the monsoon head-on, battling that infernal wind and rain, getting separatedâ€¦|

Oh godsâ€¦| Hiccup bolted up into a sitting position when he remembered Astrid. _Did she make it? Did she survive_ _the storm? Is she here somewhere?_ Was what kept going through his mind as it was barraged with questions he knew he couldn't answer.

Less than a second later he remembered what happened next, as a searing pain burned its way along his left shoulder and down his back. He was unable to contain the choked cry that tore from his throat, and he fell back down on his right side, hand automatically reaching for the source of the agony. His eyes squeezed closed and he gritted his teeth against the pain. As the burning began to gradually subside, he took a few deep breaths to calm himself and his racing heart.

Yes, he definitely remembered now. He had lost all contact with Astrid and it was just he and Toothless battling the storm. They hadn't been in it for more than five minutes before he had started to see random wingtips appearing and disappearing in the clouds around them. He had dismissed it as the rain messing with his vision, but he had grown more suspicious as he started seeing more than just wingtips, and they were all around him. And then he had heard it, the crackling behind him. Seconds later he was on fire, or at least he felt like he was on fire; like a thousand wasps were stinging him from the inside. His back had arched and he had screamed for all he was worth. He remembered hearing Toothless roar in shared agony as well, and he thought he faintly heard Astrid calling him, but everything disappeared after a few seconds and he had lost consciousness, the glorious numbness of it claiming him.

Hiccup opened his eyes and took a another deep breath before slowly sitting back up, being careful to keep his left side in general as still as possible. He got onto his knees, biting the inside of his cheek against the inevitable flashes of pain lancing up and down his back. He twisted his neck and peered over his left shoulder, trying to see if it was anything visible that was causing the pain. He winced at the movement, and his right hand subconsciously reached up to hover over the long, jagged tear he saw in the black leather. There was no blood, but the tear itself was enough to get him thoroughly concerned.

Gingerly, he picked apart what was left of the frayed ends and tensed before pulling hard on the shoulderpad, disconnecting it from the

leather and wincing from the jerking movement. He set it on the ground in front of him and studied the edge where it connected to his shoulder and saw an inch-long spot on his green shirt just beyond the edge of his jerkin that looked like a tear, also charred and frayed on the inside edges. He looked between the two of them, and then smelled the shoulderpad, receiving his confirmation.

"I get through training dragons of all species and firepower relatively unscathed only to be taken out by lightning. Figures." He muttered, shaking his head. _So how did I get __**here?**_

He set down the shoulderpad and brought his hand up to his shoulder, attempting to gently grab the fabric of his shirt with his forefingers in order to lift it so he could try to see through the tear to the skin of his shoulder and back. There was no way anything that hurt this much was even remotely okay. But the moment his fingers touched his shoulder, the pain flared, causing Hiccup's jaw to clench and his eyes squeeze shut in an effort to endure it quietly.

Once it passed, Hiccup lowered his hand in favor of discontinuing this particular endeavor, not wanting to endure any more pain than was absolutely necessary. He sighed and took another look around him at the details of the cage, scrutinizing it for weaknesses that he could possibly exploit, turning his head slowly around the perimeter of his small prison.

But he stopped as he reached his three o'clock, when he spotted something new in the shadows in the back of the cavern where the torchlight didn't reach. He squinted, leaning slightly in that direction, to try to make it out. He stopped squinting when he realized it was a figure; a person.

When did he get here? Hiccup wondered nervously to himself. _Has he been there the whole time?_

Hiccup's eyes widened as he saw a second figure appear from the darkness and silently move into place next to the first one in the shadows on the borders of the dim torchlight, giving a barely noticeable nod to his companion. Hiccup swallowed thickly, extremely unnerved by the whole "making absolutely no noise whatsoever while moving" shtick. He watched, frozen, as the first figure returned the nod, and they both stepped slowly out of the shadows.

The two men were tall, about the same as himself Hiccup estimated. They both wore black, the first one in cloth robes under various leather straps and the second in a jet black leather jerkin that hung to his knees over a white tunic. Both wore black hoods that cast shadows over their faces, making only the bottom half visible but revealing light scruff on the second man. The first had more muscle, while the second was more wiry, and each had a shoulderpad on their right shoulders with a blood red dragon skull symbol. They were disconcerting, intimidating, and not to mention closing in on the cage.

Wary, Hiccup scrambled to his feet and back a few steps, wincing and nervously watching the two as he wrapped his right hand around his useless left arm almost protectively. His heart raced as they unlocked the door, stepping inside. Creepily enough, they still made no sound while unlocking and opening the door to the cage, much less

when they entered onto the metal floor of it.

They split apart and slowly began to circle him, and he took another step back, his gaze flickering back and forth between the two trying to keep eyes on both of them. That soon became almost impossible as they fell into a rhythm of circling where one was always in view and the other was not, making Hiccup very nervous. He threw a momentary glance over his shoulder at the muscled one before looking back at the wiry one in front of him, while rocks filled the pit of his stomach. The way they moved seemed eerily similar to a prowling dragon. They continued to circle for a minute before Hiccup ventured a question.

"Who are you?" He asked, glancing between them, waiting for an answer. They remained silent and continued to circle, drawing in closer. Hiccup swallowed and tried again. "Okay, where am I?"

Suddenly they stopped midstep, the wiry one directly in front of him and the other somewhere behind him. They stared at him, creepy to say the least. Hiccup stared back for a moment, unsure of what to do.

"Look, I don'tâ€"AGH!"

Hiccup was cut off midsentence when he was suddenly grabbed from behind by the elbows and swung against the wall of the cage, slamming against it, knocking the breath out of him and causing his shoulder to burn flashes of fire again. A millisecond later he was pulled away and muscled to the floor, where the other man joined in and took a tight hold of his left arm just as his buddy did with Hiccup's right arm, and together they hauled him up and began to drag him out of the cage and into the darkness of the cavern.

~%~

Astrid couldn't remember a time when her head had hurt so much, not even when she had been swarmed by terrible terrors and fell off a house head first, or when Ruffnut had hit her with a hammer after losing a bet when they were eight. And the best part: she wasn't even conscious and she could still feel the throbbing in her head.

The world of unconsciousness was an interesting place Astrid had noticed. Well, that was one word for it. Another was weird, or crazy. Astrid had been unconscious before, from various things, but those previous times were not like this one. All those times before she had not had the weight of loss bearing down on her heart and mind, and something like that can make your brain go a little nuts when you're stuck inside it. At least that was what her current state was telling her. It was fairly obvious since what happened in the storm kept replaying itself in Astrid's mind, she once again trapped within the endless dark of the storm clouds, calling for Hiccup and hearing him scream just beyond reach.

The tears once again stained her cheeks as she extended an arm in Hiccup's direction, reaching for him. Suddenly there was more pressure on her forehead and she felt like something touched her cheek. Her left hand let go of the saddle and she reached up to brush off whatever it was, and after a few swipes she caught onto something and grabbed it tightly, trying to pull it away. But once she was

gripping it, her arm was suddenly very hard to move. More accurately she couldn't move her arm. Nor could she pull her hand away from whatever she grabbed; her fingers couldn't move either.

She tried to turn her head to see what it was, but she didn't have full mobility in her neck. When she found she could only turn her head from side to side, instead of down where she needed to turn it, a sudden panic began to blossom in her chest. Being trapped or unable to move or defend herself was a deep fear Astrid possessed, not that she'd ever shown it at any time in her entire life. Not even her parents knew about this particular fear, she'd kept it a secret and buried it deep inside herself in the hope and aspiration of becoming the best shield maiden on Berk, and she'd succeeded. She'd learned to overcome it, even ignore it. So why was it almost consuming her now?

She fought against it but she couldn't stop it as her arm moved down to her side against her will, and suddenly what she was gripping starting gripping her back. Though she couldn't see what she was doing, she reached over with her right arm to try to pull it off manually. But to her horror, when she tried her right arm was grabbed as well and pulled back over to her right side, and she couldn't move it either.

Full-blown panic starting to take over, Astrid struggled against the iron weights on her arms, eventually even screaming for Hiccup to help her even though she knew he was not there. Through her struggled she squeezed her eyes shut, willing herself to wake up, to escape this hell. Just when she was going to give up, the sound of the rolling thunder disappeared and she could no longer hear Hiccup screaming in the distance. The rain that pelted her skin evaporated, and even Stormfly disappeared from under her. Astrid's eyes were still closed, she didn't want to see what was happening, but she continued to struggle quietly even as a light appeared beyond her eyelids, a soft golden light. She could faintly hear voices on her right and left. They were fuzzy so she didn't understand what they were saying, but they were quiet and relatively soft. She didn't want to give up, she was a Viking. But the panic in her chest made the decision for her, and she opened her eyes.

She was greeted with a cool and fresh smell that filled her nostrils as she inhaled quick and sharp breaths, and soft rays of light leaked through a window in the opposite wall. The sunlight gave the room a mellow glow that seemed to warm the place, and dust particles floated lazily through the air made visible by the light. Astrid blinked in the sudden brightness, turning her head away to avoid it, and let out a quiet moan.

"Do you think she's okay?" came from her right.

At the sound, Astrid instantly snapped her eyes back open and her head up, fully awake now. Looking to her right where the voice came from, she saw a young man, probably between eighteen and twenty, gazing at her concernedly. His shaggy blonde hair hung in his eyes, half-covering the rich brown hue of them and making them seem smaller than they probably were. At first glance he didn't appear all that dangerous, but her instincts kicked in and she immediately moved to jump away to defend herself. But she wasn't able to move far when she realized that she still couldn't move her arms. It didn't stop her though, and she began to struggle violently, noticing that in fact

the young man, along with a buddy, was physically holding her arms down.

"Let me go you half-trolls!" She growled, fighting against their strong grip on her.

The blonde man put more weight on her arm to keep her down as she struggled and looked up at his companion on Astrid's left, looking practically terrified. "What do we do?!" He yelled over the threats and insults flying from her mouth.

Before the other one could respond, Astrid began kicking to enforce her threats, which proved to be an absolutely horrible idea. The second she moved her left leg, a sharp pain exploded through it, centering mainly on her shin and below. The insults were cut short as she cried out in pain, and her futile attempts to escape diminished. She screwed her eyes shut and ended with a groan.

"It's okay, it's okay." A soft voice quietly said on her left. She didn't look as she felt her leg being gently resituated and the weight on her arms reduce substantially. Once the agony receded a little, Astrid opened her eyes to her left and saw the other man watching the blonde one work on her leg. His hair was just as long and messy as the first one, only shorter in the front so that it only came a bit over his eyebrows, and a rich dark brown. She eyed him curiously. His features were soft, with the slightest hint of scruff to look manly. Slightly tan, so he was outdoors a lot. His hand had a smooth touch, but it was also considerably rough, probably from working with—_Wait, what?_

Astrid shifted her eyes down a tad, and realized that the guy was holding her hand in both of his. They were warm, and his grip was firm. Oddly nice, but at the same time making her feel wildly uncomfortable. At least she knew now why she couldn't move her hand.

She exhaled, trying to be as quiet as possible, but it caught his attention and he looked back at her with a concerned expression on his face. Astrid's breath caught in her throat when she saw that his eyes were a vibrant green, painfully similar to Hiccup's. She looked away instantly, but then realized he had said something and forced herself to look back at him.

"Are you alright?" He asked.

After a moment, Astrid rolled her eyes. "Well obviously not, if my leg is telling me anything." She shifted uncomfortably, glancing at their clasped hands. He either didn't notice, or he just didn't care, because he had yet to let go of her hand.

He looked back to his companion who was fixing her leg. "You got that?" He asked. The blonde man made a few last adjustments on her leg's position and nodded, moving back to Astrid's right side and sitting back down on his knees next to the pallet.

He turned back to her and cracked a slight smile. "You need to be more careful with that leg, you twisted it pretty bad."

Astrid glanced between them a few times. "No kidding. Will you let go of my hand now?"

He looked down at their clasped hands, now seeming almost embarrassed. "Oh, sorry. You were unconscious and looked like you were having a pretty rough time in there." He pulled his fingers away and gently laid her arm by her side, looking back at her.

Astrid stared at her hand, lips pursed, for a moment before turning her head back to the two and saying "Thank you. Now, who are you numbskulls?"

The blonde man on her right was instantly flustered, almost amusingly so, probably at her use of the term numbskull. Green-eyes on the other hand just chuckled and replied "We are the numbskulls who rescued you from near-probable death. I'm Firen, and this," He gestured to his companion, "is Valegan. But everyone calls him Vael. And you are?"

She looked at each in turn as Firen introduced them, and then answered simply "I'm Astrid."

Firen smiled. "It's nice to meet you Astrid. If you don't mind my curiosity, what were you doing in the Skid Row Straits?"

Astrid frowned at him, confused. "Skid Row Straits?"

He made gestures with his hands, attempting to shape a picture for her. "It's the area where we found you. It's all rock, mostly spires that stick out of the ground, a little foggy there sometimes."

Recognition dawned in her, and she nodded. "Oh, right, I know what that's like." She trailed off as she remembered the place in her mind, including what was missing right now. "Wait." She sat up sharply, startling the two men. "Oh gods, did you find Stormfly? Where is she?"

She heard a "Whoa, whoa, slow down!" just as a wave of dizziness and nausea washed over her like a flood, and her hand flew to her head and she fell back on her elbow. Strong hands lowered her all the way down, and she closed her eyes until it passed.

"You also really whammed your head." She heard Firen say. "There's a bit of a concussion, and you lost some blood, so you need to listen to me and take it easy."

Astrid nodded without opening her eyes. "What happened anyway?" She asked quietly.

"Vael and I were out exploring near the Straits when we heard you screaming." Firen explained. "We ran in and saw you land, you rolled really far. Your head hit the rock pretty hard, and we got to you just as you lost consciousness."

Astrid grabbed his arm. "And what about Stormfly? Tell me you found Stormfly."

Firen's brow furrowed and Vael answered "Who's this Stormfly? The only one we found was you."

Astrid sighed exasperatedly and opened her eyes at Vael. "Stormfly is

my dragon, she's a Deadly Nadder. Big, brightly colored, and with lots of spikes."

Both Firen's and Vael's faces nearly lit up. "You have a dragon?" Firen asked, excited. "Wow, how did you accomplish that? Dragons are scarce in this area."

Astrid frowned at them. "You don't have dragons?" She said, puzzled. "There are so many where I'm from, they're everywhere."

"Where are you from?" Vael asked then, looking at her with a curious glee in his eyes.

Astrid eyed them for a moment before shaking her head. "No. I don't know you, I'm not about to tell you something like that even if you did save my life."

Both their faces fell, but Firen recovered quickly. "That's fair. I'm sorry though, we honestly didn't find anyone other than you in the Straits."

Astrid didn't respond, exhaling despondently, and there was silence between them. During which Astrid focused her mind on what happened when she and Stormfly crashed. She was sure Stormfly hadn't landed too far away. Could she have been wrong? Miscalculated the distances? They were in a narrow area of the Straits—what if Stormfly couldn't stop and rolled off the edge into the ocean?

Astrid's hand clenched at her side as she mentally slapped herself for even considering such a thing. Stormfly was out there somewhere, and she was going to find her. Once she healed enough for these guys to let her go that is. She nearly cringed internally when she realized that this was the exact same thing she had told herself before when she was over the ocean looking for him. Look where that line of thinking got her then. How could the gods hate her so much as to take away the two things she cherished most in one day, in one fell swoop?

Astrid could feel the tears welling up again. She would not cry in front of these guys. No way. Resolving to do just that, she pressed her eyelids more closed as much as she could to contain the infernal moisture. But the pressure suddenly made her head hurt more, and she winced. Firen must have noticed, because she then heard him say, "You want some ice?"

She nodded, and not a moment later a soothing cold was pressed against her forehead. She almost sighed in relief, and then began thinking about a plan. After an entire minute of absolutely no present ideas, Astrid did sigh, though depressingly so. She'd give herself a few days at most to properly heal, and then she would get to work. And she'd find Stormfly. She'd find Hiccup.

At least that's what she told herself.

~%~

To Be Continued...

**A/N ~ Just some fyi down here, Firen is pronounced "Fear-in". Just in case. **

****And if you're looking for an awesome story to read, go read "To Be With You" by Lady-von-Bielefeld. Absolutely amazing. :)****

****Please review! :)****

5. Chapter 5

****Hey people! :) I apologize profusely for the long wait. I have basically no excuse but that's neither here nor there. The point is my juices weren't flowing, so there you go. XD ****

****Don't forget to read the A/N at the end of this chapter, there's extra info. ****

****Huge thank you's to all my new followers! ****

****And extra special thank you to **Lady-von-Bielefeld **for the review**, **and also to my my guest reviewers **Th, **and **Julia. **:~) Thank you so much, you guys seriously rock! :)****

****On with the show! :)****

****~%~****

Stunned and hurting, Hiccup didn't fight back. He instead bit his tongue until it bled to prevent himself from screaming out loud at the burning on his back and shoulder. The darkness of the tunnel was so complete and near overwhelming that he was unable to determine the speed with which the two men were pulling him along. He wasn't sure how they even saw where they were going.

He tried desperately to regain his footing, if only to ease the tension and pain in his shoulder and also just so they would stop dragging him. But they were moving too fast for him to get any purchase on the rocky ground, and, strangely enough, Hiccup couldn't even hear them moving. The only sound he heard in the ever present black was the quiet scraping of his boot and prosthetic as they dragged behind him. Hiccup looked around him, waiting for his eyes to adjust so he could get a handle on his relative location. But as at least a minute passed, more than enough time, nothing had changed. It was just as dark as before, reasserting his nervous confusion over how the two men could see where he couldn't.

Suddenly a barely audible sound made its way to Hiccup's ears. His head lifted, and he strained to hear more. Maybe they were finally nearly their destination, wherever that was. The sounds reached him again, rapidly increasing in volume, now seeming even familiar in a way. Reptilian. _Dragon. _

Suddenly they shifted direction with at least a ninety degree turn by Hiccup's estimation. It was a sudden and surprising move, which gave him a particularly hard jolt. He drew in a sharp breath and his eyes screwed shut as the pain spiked again, but he was able to contain any other reactions. It only took him a moment to recover and he opened his eyes, but he was forced to squint in surprise at the bright light of the many wall torches that met him. With his eyes closed, he had failed to notice the approaching light at the end of what now appeared to be a tunnel delved through rocky underground.

Now able to see, Hiccup looked around and was shocked to see how fast they were moving. He knew he wasn't very heavy but this was just degrading. The walls appeared to be almost flying by. He looked up at the two men, but they kept their heads down, keeping their faces in the shadow of their hoods. Despite the rapid pace they weren't even breathing hard.

Then, out of nowhere, they took a sudden left turn down a short tunnel that branched off before emerging at the other end into a cave-like room. It had particularly huge dimensions and a high ceiling, with various racks of different weapons placed all around by the walls. The room was of a roughly circular shape, and in the middle was a circle comprised of intricate patterns that looked like they were burned into the ground. On each of the four sides of the circle was a torch, tall and flaming.

Hiccup barely had a moment to get a good look at the place before he was dragged forward once again to the middle of the room and forced onto his knees in the middle of the circle, his arms still firmly restrained. He grunted at the impact on his kneecaps, and gravity pushed his head down. Facing the patterned ground, Hiccup realized the designs in the center where he sat were different than the surrounding others. He squinted, looking closely at them. A tingle went down his spine as he realized that the runes, as he had discovered them to be, had been discolored by blood.

"Well, well."

Hiccup's head shot up instantly when he heard the deep, smooth voice, his neck cricking a little with the sudden movement. His eyes quickly scanned the area in front of him for the source and came to rest hesitantly on the tall silhouette slowly approaching him.

"Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third."

He said each word slowly and deliberately, matching the pace with which Hiccup's face was molding into a confused frown. A bad feeling growing in his chest, Hiccup sized him up. He was relatively large, but not overwhelmingly so. He was muscular, but in no way bulky. His face was covered in dark stubble, and his very dark hair hung nearly to his shoulders. He might've actually been considered attractive were his features not twisted into a prideful and condescending sneer.

"How fortuitous," He said, "That my men happened across the son of Stoick the Vast." He came to a stop in front of Hiccup and looked down at the younger man. "They did their job well."

Hiccup eyed him nervously as he started pacing back and forth in front of him, somehow managing to make even that look menacing.

"Who are you?" Hiccup asked, staring up at the man, his voice low. "What do you want?"

He stopped and shook his head, not looking at him. "So, curious. So eager for answers. So different from the great Chief of Berk." He paused to send a smirk Hiccup's way. "Tell me, how does it feel to finally be tolerated, even accepted, by your people, by your father?"

Hiccup could feel his heart rate increasing as he listened to the man talk. His mind whirled with various explanations for his obviously intentional presence here, but overshadowing those was the buzzing question of how this man knew about his old life.

"How does it feel to be appreciated, to finally have your differences embraced instead of scorned and despised?" He stopped and knelt down in front of Hiccup, gazing hardly at him as if trying to penetrate his soul. "Oh great dragon master."

Hiccup stared back determinedly, though the coldness in this man's dark eyes added to the pile of rocks in his stomach. Hiccup kept it up for a moment, but then suddenly the man shot out a hand and grabbed his bad shoulder tightly, digging his fingernails in and causing Hiccup to yelp in pain and drop his gaze.

He breathed heavily and nearly moaned in relief when the man finally released his shoulder, and was starting to feel nauseous as he heard the man above him chuckle darkly. The two men holding him suddenly pulled him painfully upright, bringing his head up and pulling his arms further back, straining his shoulder blades.

When Hiccup's vision stopped swimming, he almost gave a jolt when he saw multiple others had entered the room and now stood in a circle around the runes. He hadn't even heard them, much less noticed their entrance.

There were three of them, two distinctly female. The male stood menacingly next to the leader. He was large, very muscled, and wore complete black and sleeveless, showing off his bulging arms. Like all the others, his face was hidden under a hood.

The two females stood to his right and left. Both wore black, mainly leather, one with grey accents and the other with dark green. Their faces were shrouded by their hoods, but they could be told apart by the strawberry blonde braid that lay out on the shoulder of only one. All of them, though, wore the shoulderpad with the blood red dragon skull.

After glancing nervously at all of them in turn, Hiccup slowly looked back to the leader, who then said, "Remember that feeling, Hiccup." He smiled evilly. "Because you'll never feel it again."

Suddenly Hiccup felt his arms seriously strain in their sockets as they were yanked to his left and right. He heard the men holding him disconnect something from two of the torches and he turned his head to see them securing his wrists in cold, steel cuffs they had uncovered on the tall shafts. They backed away out of his sight, and the two females stepped forward, kneeling down on either side of him, and they began removing his bracers.

Hiccup's gaze lingered on the leader's dark one a moment longer before he looked over at the two females, who by now were already moving on to his remaining shoulderpad and torso armor.

"Whoa, whoa, what the Hel are you doing?" He protested, though he couldn't resist or even move at all with his arms restrained the way they were. He could have sworn he glimpsed the leader grinning in amusement out of the corner of his eye, but he was too focused on his

useless attempts at resistance. They continued to place his armor on the ground between them outside the circle, and they finally stopped after removing everything but his green tunic. They took a few steps back but stayed close.

Hiccup eyed them for a moment just in case they decided to have another go, but his attention was immediately drawn away when he saw the other two men coming back through another tunnel, pulling something behind them. Hiccup's eyebrows furrowed when he heard scraping and hissing from the tunnel, sounds definitely made by a dragon. A very specific dragon.

Hiccup's chest constricted and his breath caught in his throat as Toothless was dragged into the room, muzzled, tied up, and putting up a serious fight.

"Toothless!" Hiccup immediately called to his dragon, pulling and fighting desperately against his restraints. The Night Fury instantly looked up in response to the sound of his human's voice, and his eyes lit up. He made a few happy dragon sounds as best he could through the muzzle and suddenly fought harder and with renewed vigor against the men. It didn't matter, though, as they continued to drag him into the corner of the room as if no matter how hard he fought they remained unfazed.

Toothless let out several low growls through the muzzle and thrashed helplessly as they secured him to the rocky floor, and as they backed away he let out a sad moan in Hiccup's direction.

"Toothless!" Hiccup called again, twisting his neck to the side to see the Night Fury. "You okay, bud?"

Toothless warbled quietly in response, and Hiccup whirled back around to face the leader when he suddenly began speaking again. "Good," He said. "Everything is ready." Hiccup's gut twisted nervously when the man smiled evilly. "Do it."

The females then stepped forward, each with a large dagger. They knelt by him again and started to quickly cut through the fabric of the sleeves of his tunic, then the front of it along his torso. Hiccup pulled back as much as he could, but to no avail. When they were done, the tunic was torn off from behind him, leaving him bare-chested. Hiccup clenched his jaw as the fabric slid across his shoulder, making the pain spike again, and he quickly turned to finally see what was causing it. The sight nearly elicited a gasp from the young dragon trainer.

There was scarring unlike any he had ever seen. It started on the bone of his shoulder and fanned out down the left side of his back, in a shape almost like lightening, or the branches of a leafless tree. But the lines of the scarring were red, tender, and inflamed, standing out against his lighter skin. No wonder it burned like fire.

The two females scooted back to the outside of the circle and sat on their knees, slowly drawing new symbols on the ground and muttering under their breath. Then Hiccup heard a growl sound from behind him, followed very quickly though by a moan of pain. He whipped his head around to see one of the males with a dagger making a cut on the right side of Toothless' chin and catching the blood in a tiny stone

bowl.

"What are you doing?! Stop!" Hiccup yelled at the man, who ignored him. "Toothless!" Finally, the man stood and backed away from Toothless, turning and approaching Hiccup. The other male followed and came up behind Hiccup, getting on one knee and grabbing Hiccup's right hand and pulling it open, bearing his palm. Hiccup's eyes widened, and the man made a slice on his open palm with the dagger.

Drawing in a sharp breath, Hiccup gritted his teeth against the stinging pain, screwing his eyes shut for a moment. When he opened them, they were catching his blood in the bowl. When they were done, the man released his hand and the both of them backed away and took their places on either side of the circle to Hiccup's right and left, one placing the bowl on the ground between the two females before doing so.

The head male of the five, who until now had remained standing silently next to the leader, stepped forward and picked up the bowl, stirring it with three fingers, and began making his way around the circle until he was behind Hiccup, out of the younger man's view. Suddenly, the mutterings of the two females became louder, more distinct. They were chanting in an unfamiliar language, and in a moment the two males joined in, creating a harmonized verse.

Then, suddenly, a fiery pain burned to life on Hiccup's shoulder, right on the scar. The fire was too painful for Hiccup to contain the scream that tore from his throat as his head swung back. The fire began to spread from his shoulder throughout his whole body, the pain intensifying exponentially as it went. With his head back, he barely noticed out of the corner of his eye through the blur of pain that the man behind him was slowly running his blood-soaked fingers along the red tendrils of the scar, coating them in the hot liquid which was somehow being slowly absorbed right into the skin, making the red lines almost seem to be glowing red hot from the inside.

Hiccup writhed in place as the fire coursed through his body, unable to contain the cries that continued to escape him. Vaguely, he could hear Toothless' roars of pain join his in the background, but the fire was all-consuming, dominating Hiccup's focus. Finally, the fire began to worm its way up Hiccup's neck and into his head, making his face and eyes burn hotter than he thought possible. As his face and eyes stung and burned beyond all imagined limits, the words the four were chanting suddenly became louder, enough that they filled Hiccup's head, becoming all he could hear.

_Hugur okkar tengjast . hjǺrtu okkar sameina.
>Souls okkar sameinast , hva° var einu sinni okkar ver°our mitt
.
Vi° erum eitt . Vi° erum Dragonspawn._

_Hugur okkar tengjast . hjǺrtu okkar sameina.
>Souls okkar sameinast , hva° var einu sinni okkar ver°our mitt
.
Vi° erum eitt . Vi° erum Dragonspawn._

The words became louder and louder as they repeated in Hiccup's mind, filling his ears and adding to the burning and pounding in his head. Suddenly the fire intensified to an impossible peak, and his violent screams echoed harshly throughout the darkness of the cavern, and his back arched against the inescapable burning. Then, suddenly, he could

understand the words. He knew what they meant, as they reverberated once more through his mind.

_Our minds connect. Our hearts combine.

>Our souls merge, what was once ours becomes mine.
We are one. We are Dragonspawn. _

Then, as the last word echoed through his mind, the fire drew back from the rest of his body and centered all its burning force in his chest, flaring and spiking unbearably until it suddenly dissipated, freeing him of its torment.

One last scream escaped him as the fire disappeared, his head hung and his body sagged almost lifelessly. The only thing keeping him up was the cuffs around his wrists. A strange cold began seeping through his shaking form, and he was able to draw in a few shallow breaths before everything in him went numb and the world became darkness.

~%~

To Be Continued...

A/N ~ IMPORTANT INFO DOWN HERE!

The scarring on Hiccup's shoulder i described is a real thing. There's a link in my bio to a page about it. There are pictures so you can see what it looks like, and it's also pretty descriptive about it. It's called the Lichtenberg figure, or scar. Go check it out!

Please review! :)

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6. Chapter 6

Hi there! ;) Again, sorry for the wait. But I made up for it with _my longest chapter ever! :D _Over 4 1/2 thousand words, that's a record! :)

**Anyway! I'd like to thank all my new followers! You guys are great, it lets me know you care enough to keep reading. :)

>

And a huge thank you to **Kas3y, tyjo99, **and **Lady-von-Bielefeld **for the awesome reviews! And also to my guest reviewer **The Black Blur, **your review had me in stitches! ;)

**Enough with my blathering, on with the show!
>

Enjoy! :)

~%~

Hiccup awoke with a jolt, his heart pounding and his breathing heavy. He lay on his back, the cold of the ground apparent against his bare

skin, with his arms laid out on either side. He laid still for a moment waiting for his chest to stop thumping so violently before tentatively moving his head to either side to get a view of where he was.

After a moment he realized he was back in the cage, and recent events began coming back to him in a rush. The two men, the room with the circle and the runes, the leader, Toothless, the fireâ€¦

Hiccup forced his breathing to even out and slowly sat up. But coming up off the cold ground almost instantly brought to his attention just how hot he was. And why did his head hurt so much? Closing his eyes, he brought his hands up and let his head fall forward onto his open palms. But as his forehead landed he drew in a sharp breath, wincing and instantly pulling away. His right hand was wrapped in a rough, dark strip of cloth. It wound around his palm from the wrist to the end of his knuckles, no doubt a bandage of sorts for the slice they made on his hand duringâ€¦whatever it was.

With a depressed sigh, Hiccup slowly shifted onto his knees and looked over his shoulder, searching for the scar he had discovered. His eyes widened when he saw it, as it was no longer red or inflamed. It looked like it had been there for a while, and now was a faint white, though still obvious against the skin. He reached with his right hand to hover over it for a moment before tentatively touching it with the tips of his fingers. Curiously, it didn't burn at his touch. In fact, it didn't hurt at all, though it tingled oddly and a chill shot through him at contact.

Pulling his hand back, Hiccup instead ran it through his messy hair. His eyes closed as his fingers came across the two little braids on the side, and he released a shuddering sigh.

Astrid.

_Is she still alive? _He wondered silently to himself. He gently fingered the braids, twirling his fingers around them. _Is she looking for me? _His hand dropped to his side but his eyes stayed closed, envisioning her. Her long blonde braid, her callused hands, her adorable pouty faceâ€¦

"Hiccup."

His eyes flew open and he instantly jumped up and away, landing in a defensive position with both arms up, ready to fight. Before him standing just inside the cage was one of the females from before, the one with the grey accents and the strawberry blonde braid. She stood stoically by the now open door of the cage, seemingly unfazed by his sudden movement. Surprisingly her black hood was down, hanging loosely on her shoulders and back. With her face not shrouded, Hiccup could see the gentle angles of her fair face, the slight rosy tint to her cheeks, and the soft hazel of the eyes that gazed at him neutrally.

He stared at her for a full moment before realizing what he had just done, and the speed with which he had done it. Slowly, his tensed muscles relaxed and his gaze shifted warily to himself. He looked at the way he was holding his arms, with his hands loosely open but completely ready to either form hard fists or stiffen and pinch nerve clusters. He looked at his legs and stance, the way his knees were

bent for stability yet kept springy enough to dive away at a moment's notice. He had done this on pure instinct, only this was a new type of instinct, one that he had never experienced before.

"Don't be afraid of it."

Hiccup glanced quickly back at the girl, his brows furrowing as he scrutinized her, searching her face for any deception or hidden intentions. She kept her face expertly blank, although her eyes held a slight glimmer of curiosity as they looked him over in return. He took his time before answering.

"Afraid of what?" He asked.

Her gaze dropped to the ground for a few seconds before returning to him and replying "The instinct."

Hiccup kept his gaze on her steady and he nodded slightly for her to continue.

She took a breath. "It's difficult to get used to at times. But you adjust. We all do."

Hiccup slowly returned to a normal standing stance, leaning habitually on his right leg. "We?"

She looked away and didn't respond. Hiccup didn't wait and raised his hand. "Wait, no, justâ€" He exhaled in exasperation. "Who are you? Why am I here? What did you do to me? Just tell me what the Hel is going on!"

She suddenly snapped her head back to face him. "You've been unconscious for two days."

Hiccup stared at her in surprise for a few seconds before his eyes dropped to the floor, slowly blinking multiple times and taking an unsure step back.

"You've had sufficient recovery and we believe you're ready, especially after what I just saw. It's time to get to work."

Hiccup looked back up at her warily. She met his eyes, and said "Come with me."

She turned and stepped out of the cage, taking a few steps before stopping and looking back at him over her shoulder. She gestured slightly with her head to follow her, and, seeing no other options, Hiccup complied, albeit hesitantly.

He slowly stepped out of the cage and pulled up beside her. She looked at him for a moment before the corners of her mouth turned up in a slight smile. She gestured with her head again, and then led the way into the dark exit tunnel.

Hiccup followed, and was shocked to discover that he could see. The tunnel was more dim than completely dark, and he looked around in amazement at the interior of it, not noticing the slight smile that graced the girl's features as she watched him take it in.

He was caught off guard and jumped slightly when the girl put a hand

on his arm. He glanced down at her and she nodded slightly to him, and said "Come on."

Suddenly she took off down the tunnel at a run, moving faster than he could have thought possible. "Hey, wait!" He called after her before breaking into a run himself to follow. He pumped his legs and in seconds was rounding the corner. Suddenly he was caught up to her, matching her strides as they raced down the tunnel. His eyes widened as he looked at her, and suddenly she came to a stop, catching him by surprise and sending him shooting past her a ways.

He quickly pulled to a stop and turned around, looking at the girl in bewilderment. He stared at her wide-eyed for a moment before jogging quickly back to where she had stopped. He slowed and halted in front of her. "What just happened?" He asked, searching her face.

She didn't answer, and instead gestured down the turnoff tunnel they stood in front of and saying "Follow me." She turned away from him and went down the tunnel, leaving Hiccup to sigh in exasperation before following.

When they entered, Hiccup stopped and nearly took a step back. It was the same room they had taken him to before. He could see the circle of runes in the middle of the room, with the torches, and the weapon racks, and the large spaces, and the high dark ceiling. The girl was on the opposite side of the room with her back to him, and there were no others in sight, so he stepped further into the room, wary.

He looked around, and a moment later the girl was back in front of him. She grabbed his arm again and guided him over to a rock slab jutting out from the corner wall. Hiccup saw that on the slab were all the pieces of his armor, along with a black tunic, and a black leather jerkin instead of his own brown one. The girl gestured to them with her hand. "Here."

She stepped back out of his sight and his eyes followed her. She nodded to him, and he reluctantly looked away and quickly pulled on the shirt. He glanced back at her frequently as he pulled on the leather jerkin and did the buckles, and then he grabbed the black leather top armor and shrugged into it, securing it around his chest and pulling the buckle over his shoulder.

He grabbed his bracers and was surprised to see that his knife was still in the sheath. He couldn't believe they had actually left him a weapon. Then again, he couldn't see his fire sword. But it was just a prototype; it wasn't finished and didn't exactly work perfectly yet anyway.

He finished securing his bracers and his eyes landed on the one shoulderpad. He glanced back at the girl again, but this time his gaze lingered on her since she was now holding a larger shoulderpad. It matched hers, and bore the red dragon skull. She stepped forward and held it out to him, and he studied it in her hands, not touching it.

"Take it." She said, causing him to shift his gaze to her. "You're one of us, now."

Hiccup stared at her, and his brow furrowed. "But who are you? What are you?"

There was a long beat before she moved forward and placed the shoulderpad in his hands and replied, "I'm Rhian." She stepped back. "Time to see what you can do."

Hiccup looked down at the shoulderpad in his hands, then back up to her. "Whatâ€"AGH!" He was cut off violently when something slammed him to the ground from behind. Hiccup immediately threw his arms back and grabbed whatever was on top of him and pulled it off over his head and onto the ground in front of him. The man, as he was revealed to be, quickly kicked with both feet when he jumped up, forcing Hiccup to roll to the side to avoid them. He completed the roll on one knee, bent over and poised to spring.

The man charged him and he dove up, his fist leading the way. He aimed for the guy's face, but he caught Hiccup's fist in his own and retaliated with a punch to the gut which Hiccup narrowly avoided by swinging to the right, taking the man's hand with him and twisting the arm. Unfortunately, he must have been expecting that, because his whole body twisted along with Hiccup, and when they went as far as they could go his other fist connected with Hiccup's face and he released Hiccup's arm, swinging his own into the small of Hiccup's back, knocking him completely off his feet.

Hiccup landed on his back on the rocky ground with a grunt of pain, both from the impact and from the punch to the face. He was forced to recover quickly and roll to the side to avoid the man's elbow coming down at him, and he jumped to his feet and launched himself at the man's torso, colliding with a lot of force and sending them both to the ground.

The man quickly gained the upper hand and flipped Hiccup onto his back. He rolled over and pinned Hiccup to the ground so he couldn't escape and raised his arm to give him a handful of fist. But just as the momentum started, Hiccup's own arm came up and he caught the man's fist in his own, his arm almost shaking from the exertion of holding it back.

Hiccup had to use all his strength to keep the man's fist at bay, but he was finally able to escape by getting his right leg free and bringing his knee up, slamming into the man's backside and sending him tumbling over Hiccup's head. Hiccup immediately moved into a half-kneeling position in preparation for the counterattack, but as soon as he had gotten into position the man was already up, and Hiccup was instantly met with a slam to the gut.

He was knocked back onto the ground from the force of the blow, the breath completely knocked out of him, and thankfully the girl, Rhian, stepped in then and said "That's good, Beret."

It took Hiccup a few moments to be able to breathe again, and when he did he panted heavily. His heart was racing as he lay still on his back, his mind still trying to catch up. He slowly went over what just happened in his mind, utterly shocked at what he had done. He was only reacting, responding to what his instincts told him to do when the man attacked. But it was the new instinct again. He had just participated in a full on fight with that man, Beret. He had punched a person, hard. He had fought, hard. He had used strength he never imagined he had. With this new instinct, he didn't want to know what would've happened had there been weapons involved.

After a full minute, Hiccup turned his head to look up at Rhian, who was watching him.

"What did you do to me?"

~%~

Astrid sat propped up against the wall with her arms crossed, glaring daggers at Vael, the only other person in the room. He was ignoring her like a champion; completely unfazed by the venomous looks she'd been throwing him most of the afternoon. He himself sat against the opposite wall, carving something that was hidden by his hand with a small knife.

An irritating silence filled the room, same as the rest of the day so far, and Astrid blew out a sigh half filled with exasperation and the other half extreme boredom. Vael ignored her, as always, and she shifted position slightly.

Astrid was currently furious at the man. She hadn't been allowed off the Thor-forsaken pallet the whole time she'd been there, even though there had already been epic arguments between Vael and herself on the subject. Firen had always shown up at the right moments to split them up and placate the fuming Viking, and she had always reluctantly backed off and returned to her silent frustration.

A small part of her acknowledged that Vael was only doing his job, but she still couldn't help but get mad at him. She knew he was preventing her from hurting herself further, but it felt like he was also deliberately stopping her from searching for Hiccup and Stormfly. A ridiculous notion, but it bothered her nonetheless.

Firen on the other hand had been more helpful on that subject. He had other things to attend to half the day, but he usually came back in the afternoons with a hand-drawn map of the area to help her go over it and hopefully find some hidden places Stormfly may have rolled into or found and got stuck in. They hadn't had much luck in that regard so far, and the resulting depression was beginning to weigh Astrid down.

She made up for the depression by putting up even more of an irritated façade, which was not helping matters with Vael, which was not helping matters period because he and Firen were the only people she'd had for company in the past few days. Luckily, and surprisingly, Firen didn't seem to be affected by her foul demeanor. He'd just constantly insist that he understood with a dismissive wave of his hand.

He'd somehow always manage to find new places on the map to consider, but just as always they'd turn out to be duds. This happened quite often, but, to Astrid's constant surprise, Firen would never lose his cool or show frustration, at all; whereas Astrid didn't consider herself exactly fun to be around presently.

After another go at the map that as usual would prove useless, Firen would try to lift her spirits by telling her about his village, Andross. He'd tell her about the spacious grass fields just outside the perimeter of buildings where animals grazed and crops were grown.

He'd tell her about the canvas canopies put up around the village for shade were placed just so that they made a rough circle that could be seen from above. That one always confused Astrid as to how he saw it from above when dragons were rare and untrained in the area, but she kept her mouth shut, deeming it a minor detail.

She had to admit Firen definitely got her attention away from the map when he spoke of the majestic Willow Falls deep in the forest outside the village. The way he talked about them, one would think they were the most amazing thing in the world. He described them as flowing and rushing with clear, spring water, reflecting the sun that shone down upon it and shining like the essence of beauty and purity itself. Although fancy and probably exaggerated descriptions like that normally would make Astrid scoff and mutter something about seeing it for herself first before jumping to agreement, this one somehow got to her, made her feel happy when thinking about it. Or maybe it was just the look on Firen's face when he spoke about it, the wonder and awe in his voice. It was pretty much contagious.

But, despite the wonderful feelings that accompanied talk about the Falls, there was always something else about Firen's expression, something else in his eyes, which would catch Astrid's attention. It was barely noticeable, but the stark contrast between it and the light made it just visible. It was difficult to discern, but to Astrid it seemed like an ever-so-slight sadness would creep into his expression when he got into detail about the Falls. It would barely permeate his bright eyes, and it would disappear within a moment or two, far too quickly for Astrid to study it. It struck her as strange, but he never mentioned it. And at times like these when Vael ignored her and she was bored out of her skull, she would contemplate it, revisit the sight in her mind's eye, and not notice when Firen was now entering the room.

"Astrid? Aaaaastriiiiiidâ€|"

Jolting out of her thoughts, Astrid looked up, her arms loosening from their tightly crossed position.

"Firen!" She said, slightly startled. "Sorry, didn't hear you come in."

He grinned and shook his head, walking over and kneeling down beside the pallet.

"I gathered. Is this gonna become a thing with you or something? Because you do it a lot."

Astrid heard Vael snigger from his place in the corner and she threw a glare in his direction before looking back at Firen and replying, "Well, what did you expect? I'm forced to occupy myself with only my thoughts because bozo over there is always ignoring my each and every request for some sort of activity!"

"More like demand for activity." Vael muttered from the corner, not looking up from his carving.

"I heard that!" She tossed back, not bothering to look at him.

Firen sighed and stood, moving to the other side of the room and starting to gather seemingly random things. He sat down cross-legged

on the hard wood floor and began messing with the objects, possibly putting them together to make something.

Not looking up from his work, he asked Vael "How's she been doing today?" Before Vael could say something sarcastic, he added "Injury-wise."

Vael finally rested his arms on his knees and looked up from his carving at Firen, and answered "Well, the swelling is completely gone, and it seems to not be as tender and fragile as before."

Firen nodded without looking up and said "Do you think she's ready to stand?"

Astrid perked up then, and whipped her head over in Vael's direction, looking at him hopefully.

Vael took his time, possibly on purpose Astrid thought, and blew out a long sigh, before saying in reply "I think so, as long as she doesn't put all her weight directly on it."

A rare smile spread across Astrid's face, and she couldn't help but let out a whispered "Yes!" and raise her fist to jerk it down triumphantly. Obviously Firen heard it, because he then chuckled lightly as he finished putting together what now looked like an improvised crutch and stood up, tossing it lightly between his hands and hitting the floor with it to test its durability.

He nodded in satisfaction after a moment and set it down leaning against the wall. He stepped forward and smiled at Astrid, and said "I think it's time you got back on your feet." He held out his arms for support. "Ready?"

Astrid didn't spare a second. She immediately grabbed his arms and began to pull herself up, and he helped her by digging in his heels and hauling up her entire weight. She loosened her grip once she was on her feet, and she gingerly put some weight on her left leg, lifting it up and down. Firen kept a hand on her arm just in case and observed for a second before asking "You okay? You got it?"

Astrid winced slightly once and looked at him. "Yeah, it's not that bad. Only hurts a little."

Firen reached behind him and grabbed the crutch, bringing it forward and holding it out to her.

"Here."

Astrid took one glance at it and shook her head. "No, I've got this."

He rolled his eyes good-naturedly and pushed it into her hands.

"Whatever you say, just hold onto it in case you need it at some point."

Astrid grumbled something under her breath, but took the crutch, tucking it under her arm.

Firen gave her a once over before nodding to himself and crossing the room to the door, which he opened and gestured with his hand in invitation.

"You coming?" He asked with a small smile on his face.

Astrid couldn't help but return the smile and she quickly joined him at the doorway, looking eagerly outside at the grass and sky. She looked at him and he nodded, and she stepped out the door. She was met with a warm breeze that made some loose strands of her hair fly, and that brought to her nostrils the scent of spring nature and ocean. She took a deep breath of the fresh air and smiled at Firen as he joined her in front of the small house, shutting the door behind him.

"Isn't Vael coming with us?" She asked.

Firen shrugged. "Nah, he'd rather stay here." He took a few steps forward and looked back at her over his shoulder. "Besides, there's something I want to show you."

He gestured with his hand for her to follow, then turned and went around the back of the house and away from it, heading down the hill towards the forest. Astrid followed eagerly, moving surprisingly fast despite the inevitable limp.

Together they made their way into the forest, following a path through the much foliage. Astrid kept up with him, but lagged back enough so she could take in the scenery around her. This forest was unlike the ones back on Berk. This one had tall trees and bushes, and fallen logs and such, as was normal, but this forest was a light green hue that seemed to almost glow as the sunlight shone warmly down upon it and its rays leaked through the leafy canopy above them.

There were also plenty of birds to be heard and sometimes even seen in the trees, singing at the top of their lungs to celebrate the day, along with a surprising amount of other critters that could be seen scampering about, collecting food and playing happily. It was in stark contrast to the forests of Berk, which always seemed dark and looming. It was refreshing.

Eventually they arrived at a small clearing in the trees, where Firen lead the way to the far side where an uneven rock surface was located. It was covered in moss, and grass poking through, and Firen moved past it all to the left side of the wall, as it appeared to be.

Astrid joined him there, and watched as he pulled away some obviously strategically placed bushes and branches to reveal a heavy indentation in the wall that seemed to just continue deepening as it went. Firen finished pulling all the greens away, and showed her multiple handholds on either side of the indents, along with many footholds.

"We're gonna have to climb a bit. Think you can handle it?"

Astrid shrugged. "Sure, I can do it."

"Alright," He said, turning to the wall and starting to climb. "Let

me know if you have any trouble."

After he gained some height, Astrid set the crutch down against the wall and followed, carefully placing her hands and feet wherever he did. She winced multiple times during the climb from the pressure and angles on her ankle, but, ever the Hofferson, she didn't say anything, and within a few minutes they had made it to the top which proved to be a high and large rock ledge that reached above the trees.

She followed Firen on her knees close to the edge and sat down, seeing the view and opening her eyes wider to take it all in.

In a word, it was breathtaking. From here she could see the top of the leafy forest ceilings, and she was able to watch the highest leaves sway as the wind gently prodded them. Just beyond that, she could see the village, which wasn't actually that far away. She discovered she could actually see the circle of shade canopies Firen had told her about and decided this must have been where he had seen them himself. The horizon was a faraway fuzzy line, and the sun beamed down freely on the two of them from the right side of the blue sky.

Astrid felt a hand on her arm and glanced over at Firen, who was raising an arm to point to their left.

"You see over there?" He said, pointing to the far left corner of the island where towering rocks could be seen from even here. "That's the Skid Row Straits, where you landed, and where your dragon is supposed to be."

Astrid was suddenly on high alert and squinted at the location in the distance. Her jaw clenched in frustration and, surprisingly to even herself, self-loathing. How could she even for a minute forget what she was really here for? Hiccup and Stormfly were counting on her; she wasn't allowed to enjoy a walk in the forest.

And that was another thing, she thought. Why in Helheim did it not occur to her that Firen was leading her out here for the purpose of helping her find Stormfly? Astrid wanted to slap herself for her carelessness, and for thinking to even remotely enjoy herself. She had a purpose, a mission, an absolute: she must find Hiccup and Stormfly. There would be no pleasure, no break, no relaxing. They needed her. And she needed them.

Firen must have felt her tense up under his hand, because he moved it from her arm to her own hand, which was clenched in a fist on the rock beneath them. He didn't hold it, he merely placed his hand gently on top of hers comfortingly, and said "I've been coming up here every day to scout the area for places where you dragon might be that we could look at on the map, but, as you know, I haven't been very successful so far."

Astrid leaned back and shifted her gaze to him, moving her hand out from under his.

"So why did you bring me here?" She asked dejectedly.

That was when he gave her a slight smile and replied, "I think I know where we can find your dragon."

****~%~****

****To Be Continued...****

****A/N: Fyi, ****Rhian is pronounced** _Ree-ahn. _**Thanks for reading! And don't forget to review! :)****

7. Chapter 7

Haiiii! :) Sorry again for the wait, but i tend to write in spurts. ;)****

_Huge thank you's to** _Lady-von-Bielefeld**, **Kas3y**, and
**NightsAnger **for the reviews, and also to my guest reviewer
dreamworksdiscney. **You guys are great!**
>**

****Also an enormous thank you to my amazing beta **dragonlover17,
love ya girl! **
>**

****Don't forget to review afterwards, and enjoy! ****

****_~%~_****

Astrid pulled back and looked at Firen incredulously, her eyes widening just a little.

"What?" She breathed out the word, barely believing it.

He took on a more serious visage as he once again lifted his arm towards the immediate area around the Straits, directing her vision.

"You know I've been gone most of the last two days. I've been out there, looking for any signs your dragon might have left in her wake that could lead us to her." He lifted a finger directly to the rocks. "I was able to find right where you landed, and I've been searching that quadrant of the Straits."

He lowered his arm and returned his gaze to her.

"And today, when I was out there, I found something."

Astrid looked at him, telling herself not to hope.

"What was it, what did you find?"

He took a breath and told her. "They were pretty distinctive marks of a crash-landing, and there were also plenty of scrapes and scratches on the rock, probably from the claws and talons. It looked to me like she landed and rolled a ways like you did, but she's not there, so I'm guessing she's not injured."

Astrid exhaled in relief as she listened. The knowledge itself that Stormfly was probably perfectly fine had lifted some weight off her shoulders. Not a lot, since Stormfly wasn't with her yet, but every bit helped. She shifted position on her knees eagerly. "What are we

waiting for?" She said. "Let's go."

Firen grabbed her arm before she could rise, and protested, "Wait, first of all, I don't think it'll do any good to go looking around the crash site, there were no footprints leading away so I think she flew off. And secondly, it's too late in the day to be heading out that far, especially with your leg."

Astrid groaned in exasperation and gave him a slight glare. "Are you ever going to let up?"

Firen, completely serious, replied, "No, not where your health and safety are concerned."

"You don't even know me, what are you so worried about?" Astrid retorted.

"You're right, I don't." He admitted. "But I think I know you well enough to know that if we go out looking for your dragon right now, and you hurt yourself even more, not only will it hinder this search which to me seems really important to you but it will also make you hate yourself for doing it."

Astrid looked at him for a moment, not wanting to admit that he was right.

"And," he added, "I think you already hate yourself enough for whatever happened."

Astrid was still for a minute, and then she shrugged, and said, "You've only known me for two days Firen, how much of an open book am I?"

Firen gave a small smile. "Don't worry, you're actually pretty slammed shut. I'm just a people person."

Astrid clenched her jaw and looked away from him, staring at the canopy of trees.

"Look," She heard him say, "I brought you out here to show you what I found out. Let's go back and rest your leg, we can look at the map better now that we have a relative location."

After a moment Astrid sighed in defeat, pulling her arm out of his grip. She pulled back from the ledge and scooted back down to the rock ladder, beginning the climb down. Firen followed closely, and thankfully he kept the silence. Astrid absolutely did not feel like talking at the moment.

It didn't take them long to walk back to the village, and they did so in complete silence. When they arrived, and Firen helped her back inside, he whispered to her, "It's okay; I'll go back out tomorrow. I'll find something then, I'm sure of it."

Luckily Vael was no longer in the house when Astrid entered, so she was able to lay down quietly in the darkness and think. She felt a lot better now that she knew Stormfly was alive and probably well, but she still had a nagging feeling in her stomach that there was something wrong. It had been two days, and Stormfly hadn't shown up yet. She hadn't been seen by anyone, Astrid hadn't heard any roars or

dragon sounds of any kind nearby; it was like she wasn't even searching for her rider.

Astrid frowned at that thought. _Why wouldn't she be searching for me? _She asked herself, though unable to answer. After everything they'd been through togetherâ€”after all she did to get Astrid to land and safetyâ€”why in Thor's name would she leave and abandon her now?

Astrid shivered as many dark and frightening theories came to mind. What if she _was _hurt, and she flew away to search for help, only in the wrong direction? What if she got confused and flew back to Berk? What if she was caught and killed by dragon trappers?

Astrid shut her eyes tight to block out the dark thoughts, sending up a silent prayer to Odin that the horrid theories would turn out to be just that: theories. For all she knew Stormfly could be combing the island for her, searching ceaselessly until she found her. Giving a quiet groan, Astrid shifted onto her other side and banished all thoughts of the missing dragon, knowing she needed to be well rested for Firen to even consider letting her out tomorrow. Unfortunately, they were just replaced by thoughts of Hiccup.

She winced as he came to mind, and, once again in vain, she wondered where he was, what he was doing, if he was fighting to survive somewhere, if he was even still alive. Unwillingly, the last image she had of him appeared in the forefront of her mind. It was when they were about to fly into the storm, a highly dangerous situation, and he had chosen then, of all times, to turn on the charm and call her 'milady' just as they were about to enter the raging winds of doom. She remembered noticing him fighting back a smile just as they flew into the torrents, and feeling annoyed that he'd act like that in a moment so serious. But now, she was glad of it, of Hiccup remaining his usual fun and dorky self even in so dire a situation. It meant her last memory of him was not of fear or anxiety, but the real boyâ€”_man, _she corrected herselfâ€”she loved and adored.

Astrid's eyes opened in sudden shame as she realized that, in the midst of her remembering him how last she saw him, she had begun to mourn him. She couldn't do that, not now. He could be out there, possibly injured or dying, only able to hang on because he knew she would find him, and here she was giving up on him. Astrid's fists clenched in a small spurt of anger at herself, but it passed after a moment, and she took a deep breath, closing her eyes.

She would sleep now, and rest; she'd let Firen and Vael have their way with making her rest and heal. But, in a few days, a week at most, no matter what either of them did or said, she _would _go out there. She w_ould _find Stormfly. She _would _find Hiccup. And this time, she wouldn't let them stop her.

~%~

Hiccup stared up at Rhian for a few moments, waiting for an answer which never came. After another moment, he'd waited long enough and slowly got to his feet, wincing at the residual pain in various locations throughout his body. His eyes flickered quickly to Beret, noting that he stood in a seemingly relaxed position, probably meaning he would not be attacking again very soon, and then looked

back at the girl, who stood stoically returning his gaze.

Suddenly, the silence was broken when a sharp voice sliced through it from behind Hiccup, surprising him and causing him to jump slightly and back away toward a side wall between the two in front and whoever was in back.

"They did what I ordered them to." The voice said, and Hiccup snapped his head to the other side as he backed away and saw the man from before, the leader. He was standing in the doorway of another entry tunnel, smiling at Hiccup darkly as if he ruled the world. "They did what I've been planning for years."

Hiccup could feel his heart quickening to a pounding beat as his eyes slightly widened. "You've been planningâ€¦this?" He asked, cautious. "You've been planning to kidnap me, to torture me?"

The leader released a deep and unnerving laugh as he stepped further into the room menacingly.

"Oh Hiccup; so naïve." He said, obviously enjoying himself. "Believe me, young Haddock, when I say your torture is only just beginning."

Hiccup halted a few feet away from the wall, watching him nervously.

"Who are you? What did you do to me?" He asked, growing more fearful by the minute.

The man feigned shock. "Did I forget my manners?" He said, grinning wickedly. "I am Torvak. And you, oh great dragon master, are now my slave."

A chill went down Hiccup's spine, and his breathing increased, along with his heart rate.

"What do you mean slave?" He asked, genuinely scared now. "Why are you doing this?"

Torvak waited for a moment as the other hooded man, the large one, walked in and took a position at his side, his bulging arms hanging by his sides, before turning back to Hiccup and answering, "To put it simply, I want Stoick the Vast dead." He said, a murderous look on his face. "And I want him to suffer as much as possible before you kill him."

Hiccup's eyes widened exponentially and he shook his head, taking another step back. "No, noâ€¦"

"And before you ask why on earth you would do such a thing, and in response to your earlier inquiry," He jerked his head in Hiccup's direction as indication to the man at his side, who then took a step forward and simply looked at Hiccup.

Suddenly, there was a blinding pain in Hiccup's head, like a thousand needles piercing through his mind, and, not by his own will, he fell into a kneeling position on the ground, his head hanging after releasing a cry of agony. The pain then faded and lingered for a moment before disappearing, leaving Hiccup barely able to take in the

thin, shuddering breaths he was.

He heard Torvak approaching and saw his feet stop right in front of him, and he then heard him say, "Because I am your master now. You serve me. You have no choice, neither does your dragon."

Hiccup's head suddenly flew up of its own accord, requiring him to look up at Torvak from the position on his knees, from which he found he could not move. "Any attempt to fight or resist will only end in your intense, intense pain." He said, smiling evilly.

He suddenly grabbed Hiccup's jaw, clenching it tightly and making him gasp in pain.

"As I said, young Haddock, your torture has only just begun."

He then turned and walked out of the room, and as soon as the hooded one followed, the invisible bonds holding Hiccup on his knees vanished, and he collapsed forward onto the ground, panting. He laid there for a moment, trying to calm his racing heart, and then he felt a gentle hand on his back.

"Are you alright?" Came the surprisingly concerned voice of Rhian.

Hiccup winced as he slowly pulled himself back up onto his knees, aided by the girl who held his arm to keep him steady. He looked at her, who, again surprisingly, was gazing at him with sympathy.

"What do you care?" He muttered wearily, looking at her.

Her voice came out soft, and even kind, as she replied, "I know the first time is always the worst."

Hiccup nearly flinched as he thought about experiencing that again, and his eyes widened at her. "He does that to you? More than once?"

She nodded. "Only if we try to fight. And it's not Torvak himself that does it; it's Siedan, the man who was with him."

"But what exactly _is _he doing? And how is he doing it?" Hiccup asked, anxious.

"Wellâ€¦" Rhian began, though it looked like she wasn't sure how to explain. She didn't have to right away as it turned out, for in that quiet minute another hooded man entered the room. Only, any notice of his arrival disappeared from Hiccup since he was accompanied by a certain Night Fury.

"Toothless!" Hiccup exclaimed, stumbling to his feet and meeting his dragon halfway, gripping him in a tight hug around his head and neck while Toothless made happy crooning sounds. Hiccup held on tightly for a moment before pulling away and running his hands all over Toothless' head affectionately.

"I'm sorry bud, I'm so sorry! Are you okay?"

Toothless snorted as he rubbed and bumped his head against Hiccup, as if demanding why he felt the need to be sorry. Finally deciding he

was alright, Hiccup let out a quiet laugh and touched his forehead to that of his dragon. "I missed you too, bud."

Rhian stood up then, a movement unnoticed by Hiccup but apparently seen by Toothless, because the Night Fury then released a low growl and wrapped his body protectively around his rider, baring his teeth. Hiccup wasn't sure at first whether to discourage him or not, but, realizing that the girl obviously had the answers he desired, he placed a hand on Toothless' spine, stroking it calmly.

"It's okay bud, it's okay." He said, waiting patiently until Toothless reluctantly unraveled himself from around Hiccup and slightly relaxed, though his teeth remained bared and he still crouched slightly.

Hiccup looked at Rhian and took a step forward. "Please," He pleaded, "I need answers. Tell me what you did to me; tell me what's going on."

She gazed at him for a minute, apparently in the midst of indecision, before releasing a sigh that said 'I hope I don't regret this' and nodding. "Alright."

She took a breath before beginning. "More than a century ago, there was a man by the name of Doran who lead his tribe with honor and glory, never failing to mercilessly slay any dragons he came across. He was viewed by the other tribes as the most powerful and ruthless chief in the Archipelago, and the alliances between them only existed out of fear of being conquered.

"Doran loved to kill dragons, it was disgusting. He got such a thrill out of it; he had his men capture them during raids so he could relieve his boredom later in the week. But, luckily, there were some who did not share his bloodthirsty sentiments. Some of the tribe resisted, and stood up to Doran, trying to convince him of how barbaric and, to be honest, evil he was being. Their insurgence sent him into a rage of fury, and he tried to have them executed on the spot. Most of them were brutally murdered right there, but a few managed to escape. They fled across the ocean and, just as they were sure they would die of starvation, they came across an island. It was a dark island, covered in shadow and mist, but they had no choice but to land and seek shelter and food. And they found it.

"They unwittingly stumbled into the nest of a great dragon. It is said he was so large his size could not be accurately determined, and his eyes were a bright red, his species unidentifiable. The dragon spoke to them with his mind, inquiring as to their purpose in his home. They told him all that had happened on their island, all that their leader had done and would continue to do despite their attempted intervention. The dragon seemed furious at this news, and offered to help them win back their island from this tyrant. Then, using what could only be the magic of a most powerful and dangerous species of dragon, he brought the Vikings and some of his children together, literally, combining their hearts and souls, connecting their minds together, making them one with each other.

"Once the process was complete, he sent a flock of his children with the Vikings back to their island to fight Doran, and to free their people from his bloody iron fist. There were so many losses through the course of the battle; two of the Vikings who escaped the first

time were killed, and their dragons died with them. By the end of the battle, the dead were so many they littered the streets, the forests. But Doran survived. In the end, he faced off against the last remaining Viking who had defied him, and the battle lasted into the night. Finally, just as the moon was about to rise, Doran was defeated. The last Viking looked out at his home and saw all the dead, the carnage, the suffering, that he and his companions had caused. He was overcome with guilt and fled on his dragon, over the ocean under a red moon.

"As he ran, his guilt and sadness turned to bitterness and anger, and he returned to the great dragon's island, full of fury. He blamed the great dragon for his losses, saying that it knew what would happen, and just as good as caused it to happen. The dragon was angry at his ungratefulness, and once again used his magic. But this time he placed a curse on the Viking, saying he would never be released from his guilt and anger and torment, and that it would linger on as long as he lived, forever to haunt him to the end of his days. But the dragon wasn't completely without mercy, and he provided the Viking with the means to create more like him so he wouldn't be lonely. However, it is uncertain whether the dragon intended this as a blessing or another curse, for the Viking would never be able to grow close to any others, or manage to put his pain behind him and overcome it, because of the dragon's curse. And you know how truly alone a crowd can make one feel."

Hiccup stared at her, unsure of what to think of the sudden history lesson.

"Whoa—uh—" Hiccup stammered, taking in all the information. "Alright, but what does all that have to do with me?"

Rhian finally lifted her eyes back to him, gazing steadily for a few moments before continuing.

"The Viking ran with his dragon, and never saw the Great One again. He wandered the oceans, explored the islands, anything to take his mind off the pain of his past. But, true to the dragon's word, he could not escape it. Finally, after many, many years, he created his first companion using the magic the Great One taught him. Considering he himself was connected with the child of the great dragon, he decided to call the combined state of being Dragonspawn."

Hiccup's eyebrows rose when he heard the word, and he involuntarily took a step back closer to Toothless. That was the word he had heard them speak in the midst of the fire earlier, when they were torturing him and Toothless.

Rhian nodded, as if reading his thoughts. "Siedan is that last Viking. He created you, he created all of us." She gestured to herself and to her two—now three as the other female had entered unnoticed—hooded companions. "All dragons have a pack, a nest. We, together, are our own pack. And, like all other packs, we have an Alpha."

Hiccup looked at her nervously as he drew back closer to Toothless, heart racing, and finished the sentence. "Siedan is our Alpha." Rhian nodded, not saying anything to give him space to work it through on his own. "That's why he can get inside our heads; make us do what he wants?"

Again, she nodded, her unreadable expression slowly morphing into sympathetic concern.

"I'mâ€|" Hiccup began, still processing fearfully in his mind. "I'm connected to Toothless now?"

"Yes," Rhian confirmed. "You have a much closer bond than ever before. You have a mental connection that allows you to sometimes, though involuntarily, share emotions, feelings. You have a connection to each other's hearts, giving you shared strength, speed, agility, and instinct that only a dragon would have, but also allowing you to feel each other's pain. Andâ€|"

She paused, as if unsure whether to complete her sentence. Although Hiccup was pretty sure he knew what she was going to say next, and dreaded that he was right, he pushed for it. "And?"

She inhaled a deep breath, and finished, "And you have a connection to each other's soulsâ€|ensuring that one cannot live without the other." She swallowed, her eyebrows slightly creasing in empathy towards him and how she knew he must've been feeling. "If one of you diesâ€|"

"So does the other one." Hiccup finished, his gaze dropping to the ground as he put a hand on Toothless' shoulder above his wing. Toothless crooned comfortingly, nudging Hiccup's hand and bringing his tail around Hiccup's legs. After a moment, Hiccup looked at Toothless and attempted a weak smile in thanks for his efforts, and stroked his head.

_Can this week any worse? _He thought as his palm ran over Toothless' cool scales. Eventually, it would no longer continue to surprise him that it in fact could.

~%~

To Be Continued...

A/N: Hi there! Just a quick fyi before you go, Siedan is pronounced "Sigh-dan"

Please review and have a great day/night! :)

8. Chapter 8

**_Over a year ago I lost all inspiration for this story. I tried many times to ink out another chapter, but to no avail. And then, a random morning last week, the spark returned. It licked at the dusty shelves of storytelling in my mind, churning into full flame. And here, now, I have a new chapter. If any followers of this story return for this, I thank you for your patience (or impatience; who knows? haha) I hope to get out more and not vanish again. This one is dedicated to the lovely peeps who've reviewed and followed since the last chapter and were so encouraging. :)
Enjoy!_**

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xxx

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* * *

><p>Astrid brushed her fingers lightly over the days-old marks in the dirt. She'd already found a few Nadder spines that'd been smashed off in the crash. She hoped they were the only thing that her dragon had lost.<p>

Easing back on her heels, Astrid sighed, using her hand to rub away some sweat on the back of her neck. She looked to the sky. Tracking wasn't her strong suit; everyone knew that, including herself. As if she wasn't horrible enough at it, there were hardly any tracks to even track. She'd take an axe any day.

_Stormfly doesn't need an axe, _she reminded herself in frustration. She'd never really been expected to hunt for any reason until now. Before peace came to Berk, the only creatures she battled were dragons, which generally just came at them head on. No tracking skills needed there.

Never in her life had Astrid felt so unprepared. So inadequate.

She looked up when she heard Firen calling for her from across the crash site. Rising, she left her section and joined him at his, where he was crouched just as she had been.

"She walked over here, not steadily though." Firen gestured to the gashes in the rock on the ground. "Like she was having trouble getting a grip on the ground."

Astrid watched him study the marks further, both silent. She eyed the gashes anxiously, wondering if Stormfly had been disoriented from the crash. Nadders were known for being the most nimble on their feet, but the evidence of her dragon's movements painted a different picture. Astrid was unsure whether or not to be suspicious about any of it. She was unsure about a lot of things nowadays.

She shifted on the balls of her feet, her mostly healed ankle twinging slightly.

Firen shook his head and stood. "I make out anything useful, none of this makes sense."

Astrid crossed her arms, not looking at him. She scrutinized the marks. "Well," she began, moving slowly along the line of scratches. "She obviously was heading in this direction, and since the tracks stop she must have flown off." She looked over her shoulder at Firen. "We could try exploring the direction she was headed?"

Firen shook his head again. "I told you, I've gone over this whole region, there's nothing to find."

"Well you must not have looked long and hard enough." Astrid huffed and stalked away toward the tree line.

"You can't go that way, Astrid." Firen called after her.

Astrid's hands tensed into fists. These people were really getting on her nerves, telling her what she could and couldn't do. She was one of the best warriors of Berk! Not to mention all the work she had done with the dragons. Being bossed around by some guy she barely knew " two actually if she included Vael " was getting downright insulting! Surely no one would blame her if one of them just happened to wake up with an axe in his head!

"And why can't I go that way, Firen?" She demanded, her voice rising with her temper. She emphasized his name, filling the word with contempt. "I've done what you've asked! I've sat around for days on end," She lifted her fingers in air quotes. "Letting myself heal! I've put up with Vael's bitchy attitude, I've listened to your advice, I've let you do all the work for me! All while it's my dragon that's missing, my responsibility, my boyfriend who could be dead!"

Firen gazed at her, looking slightly shocked. He opened his mouth, but uttered not a sound.

Astrid pointed a finger at him, steady as a rock. "You don't get to tell me what to do anymore." With tense calm, she turned and walked away.

Firen didn't pursue her, for that at least she was thankful. If he followed her she might end up apologizing. She was honestly fed up with it all, even if he meant well. She didn't let herself think about him and his intentions, whatever they were; didn't allow even a sliver of space for regret. Either way, she had to do something. She was done waiting.

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Toothless crooned worriedly from his perch on the boulder. The ground quaked as the two men were thrown around and beaten up, each doing their best to smash the other to a pulp. The larger one was suddenly punted across the arena, slamming into the rock that the dragon was balanced on. Toothless yelped and tumbled off his seat, landing on the man.

The nightfury lied on his back and rumbled in confusion as if to say, "How did I get here?"

Hiccup approached at a run, grinning slightly in amusement. "Having a little trouble there, Beret?" He scratched Toothless' ear while the man under the dragon repeatedly smacked Toothless' side with his free arm to make him get off. Toothless made a throaty purring sound before rolling to the side onto his feet, freeing Beret.

The man Beret quickly jumped up, his chest heaving. He glared at Toothless for a moment, then whipped to the side and punched Hiccup in the face.

Hiccup flew back a few yards, landing roughly on the ground. Toothless roared protectively on instinct and bounded over to his rider. Hiccup rolled onto his side and stumbled to his feet,

grumbling, with one hand on his face.

"What was that for!?" He yelled at Beret, stalking back over to the man.

He shrugged. "Nobody said the fight was over."

"Don't play stupid with-"

"I don't play stupid." Beret interrupted with a growl. His glare returned and he seemed to get taller and bigger somehow.

Hiccup matched the dirty look, and Rhian appeared, stepping between them.

"Guys! You're supposed to be training, not arguing." Staring Beret down, she handed Hiccup a handful of snow wrapped in a thin cloth.

Hiccup groaned and took it, looking at it quizzically before holding it against his face. "Where'd you get this?" He asked as he stepped back, giving Beret one last dirty look before Rhian turned to him.

"Krev."

Hiccup shook his head. "What does that even mean? You keep saying these things-"

"Krev is a dragon, Hiccup." Rhian answered, resting her hands on her hips. "A Snow Wraith."

The dragon trainer threw his free hand in the air, flailing it in somewhat mild frustration for a few moments before sighing heavily. "You have a gods-damn Snow Wraith?" He asked as calmly as he could.

Beret shrugged. "Yeah, she's Dune's dragon."

Rhian shot her companion a look, and quickly added, "Dune is another one of us, a Dragonspawn. You haven't met him yet."

Hiccup sighed. "What else do you have then," He questioned sarcastically. "A Screaming Death?" Neither Rhian nor Beret answered. "Seems like there's a lot of things I don't know yet." He muttered, turning away and suddenly noticing another person who had been standing behind him.

"Well, now you do." The newcomer said, his voice clipped and deep.

"Dune." Rhian whispered to Hiccup.

The man, Dune, was as tall and lanky as Hiccup himself. The uniforms must be customizable, Hiccup thought randomly, since Dune's sleeves were short where Rhian's were long and Beret's were nonexistent. On his forearms were bracers of strange design; his black suit was accented with deep blue, and, as they all did, he sported the red dragon skull on his shoulder. His blonde hair was light, and his eyes were an icy blue.

"Like to stare much?" He quipped, and Hiccup quickly straightened.

"Uh, nice to meet you?" Hiccup wasn't sure how to approach this one. He'd been in this place for days now, excluding the time before the Dragonspawn ritual, only seeing Rhian and Beret. He tried exploring, but the two kept their eyes on him without rest, constantly forcing him to "train". So Torvak could use him for his purposes as soon as possible, Hiccup figured.

"Whatever." Dune replied, turning and walking away with prowling stride. Hiccup raised an eyebrow at the strange fellow.

"He's the only one to ever train a Snow Wraith." Beret said, a slight scowl on his face. "No one knows how he did it."

"He used to be nicer, you know." Rhian commented. "When he became Dragonspawn with the Snow Wraith, he took on some characteristics of its personality."

"That happens?" Hiccup inquired, glancing back at her.

She nodded. "It happens with all of us. You'll see it eventually."

Hiccup opened his mouth to reply, but was cut off by yet another new voice. A girl ran into the arena, glancing once at Hiccup before declaring to Rhian, "He's coming."

Rhian and Beret both stiffened, and Hiccup noticed Dune hopping off his newfound seat on a rock. "Siedan." Dune muttered, quickly crossing to the center of the room. The new girl nodded and shoved Hiccup rather roughly toward where Dune was. Beret grabbed his shoulder and pushed him into place in a line, the others joining in.

The man himself slowly strode into the arena a moment later. Hiccup felt defiant, but wasn't sure he wanted to feel the sting of his Alpha's control again.

Siedan stopped in front of Rhian at the front of the line. "Torvak has a mission for you." He stated.

"A mission, Sir?" Rhian replied, the epitome of stiff posture.

"Yes," He growled. He began walking slowly, parallel to the line of dragon riders, staring each of them down in turn as he explained their objective. Hiccup kept his eyes straight ahead, afraid that if he looked at the leader he would throw a punch; or maybe just choke on his own heart wildly beating itself up his chest and into his throat.

When Siedan reached Hiccup he stopped, glaring murderously at the smaller man. Hiccup kept his gaze where it lay, now on Siedan's collarbone. Stupidly, he was distracted by a necklace of bone strung around the man's neck. He realized the bone was from a dragon's paw.

Siedan growled, jarring Hiccup back into reality. "I said," His voice was low, vicious. "Are you clear on your mission?" It was less a question and more like a challenge; a challenge for the dragon rider to defy his master.

Hiccup hesitated, but his desire to not be tortured again won over. "Yes, Sir."

Siedan held his gaze for many moments too long, before finally turning and stalking out of the arena.

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Astrid cupped her hands in the water of the stream, splashing her face with the refreshing chill. She paused, resting her hands on the ground as she stared at her reflection on the water's surface. Her blonde braid hung over her shoulder, her face was dirty, and her eyes glimmered a stormy hue. Easing back on her knees, she looked at her hands; the scarred skin, the filthy nails, the calloused fingertips that were accustomed to gripping her dragon's saddle.

The thought crossed her mind that she might never feel Stormfly's scales again, and her fist clenched. Scowling, Astrid stood and strode into the village, heading for the small house that Firen had kept her in.

Yes, she had returned to the village. Not from any lack of bravery, or confidence "but of ground to walk on. She wouldn't enjoy admitting it, but Firen was right. A little bit. The direction she went when she left Firen had led to nothing but another rocky ledge overlooking the ocean. Despite her feelings, she would in fact need his help to navigate.

But that didn't mean she would not be in charge.

Oh, yes, she would be very much in charge this time around. She spoke the truth when she said she was fed up with being bossed around. It was her turn.

Emerging from her thoughts, Astrid saw that she was approaching her destination. She glanced around her, noting that there were no villagers in sight. That seemed to be happening a lot whenever she was here. Dismissing it as odd coincidence, she marched up the stone steps embedded in the grass leading up to the front door; she flexed her shoulders and took a breath.

Pushing the door in and entering with confident strides, she opened her mouth to start talking, but before even getting a syllable out she was cut off by _him._

"He's not here, and I don't want to listen to you complain again." Vael said, not even looking at her. "I've got my own life you know, and I'm done wasting it here watching you flap your gums, being a nuisance." He threw some provisions, plus other seemingly random objects, into a satchel, slinging it over his back. "I'm done being here 24/7 just in case I need to help you at the drop of a hat." He

sheathed his knife, and finally rested his gaze on her, looking her directly in the eye. "So, do me a favor and don't come whining to me anymore about how miserable you are."

He stalked towards her, then straight past her out the door, as bold as brass.

Shocked into silence for a moment, Astrid didn't turn to follow Vael immediately. But, scowl returning, she started running after him. "Excuse me?" She called after him, annoyance in her tone.

"You heard me." He answered, not looking back.

Catching up to him, Astrid matched his stride, glaring at him in silence until he gave an exasperated groan and stopped, turning to face her. "What do you want?"

"I want you to stop being an ass, that's what I want!" The girl stood tall in front of him, her expression fiery. "First of all, I've lost two people who are very important to me - literally lost â€" so I think I have the right to be a bit upset. Second of all, you need to get your crap together before I punch you!"

"I'd like to see you try."

Astrid growled in rising anger, dodging a tree; they had reached the outskirts of the village and were approaching the forest. "I-"

Suddenly the world was shaking. Astrid's ears were bombarded with the heavy sound of an explosion, her back stinging with the heat of fire. She and Vael stumbled, whipping around and looking back toward the village. Smoke filled the air, and Astrid was forced to squint in the hot light of the blazing flames that licked across the roofs of houses. Vael cursed, taking off at a run towards the mayhem.

Astrid followed without a second thought, weaving between the haphazardly placed fences surrounding the village. Vael sprinted through, dodging running villagers, Astrid hot on his heels. He made for the house, for a shed to the side, quickly yanking out weapon by weapon. He tossed Astrid her axe.

"I thought I lost this!" Astrid exclaimed, snatching it out of the air and feeling its familiar grip in her hand.

"Firen kept it for you," Vael replied. "He does things like that."

With an armful of assorted weapons, Vael rushed past her to the open area of the village and began handing them out to the other men.

"Vael!" Astrid called after him as she followed. "I already checked the skies, there's no one â€"

Vael shoved her away. "That's how it starts, Astrid! Theyâ€"

An ear-splitting roar filled the air, and Astrid's gaze shot up to the sky.

"Dragons."

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><p>To Be Continued...**

****_Please Review! :) _****

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